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Alexander Maclaren Sermons on The Epistle to the Hebrews Part 3

Hebrews 7:2. Righteousness First, Peace Second

‘First being, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and after that also King Salem, which is, King of peace.’ — Hebrews 7:2.

THAT mysterious, shadowy figure of the priest-king Melchizedec has been singularly illuminated and solidified by recent discovery. You can see now in Berlin and London, letters written fourteen centuries before Christ, by a king of Jerusalem who describes himself almost in the very words which the Old and the New Testaments apply to Melchizedec. He says that he is a royal priest or a priestly king. He says that he derived his royalty neither from father nor mother, nor by genealogical descent; and he says that he owes it to ‘the great King’ — possibly an equivalent to the ‘Most High God’; of whom Melchizedec is in Scripture said to have been a worshipper. The name of the letter-writer is not Melchizedec, but the fact that his royalty was not hereditary, like a Pharaoh’s, may explain how each monarch bore his own personal appellation, and not one common to successive members of a dynasty.

And are not the names of King and city significant — ‘King of righteousness... King of peace’? It sounds like a yearning, springing up untimely in those dim ages of oppression and strife, for a royalty founded on something better than the sword, and wielded for

something higher than personal ambition. Such an ideal at such a date is like a summer day that has wandered into a cold March.

But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews imposes a meaning not only on the titles, but on their sequence, of course therein he is letting a sanctified imagination play round a fact, and giving to it a meaning which is not in it. None the less in that emphatic expression 'first King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace,' he penetrated very deeply into the heart of Christ's reign and work, and echoed a sentiment that runs all through Scripture. Harken to one psalmist: 'The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.' Harken to another: 'Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.' Harken to a prophet: 'The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.' Harken to the most Hebraistic of New Testament writers: 'The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace.' Harken to the central teaching of the most Evangelical, if I may so say, of New Testament writers: 'Being justified' — made righteous 'by faith, we have peace with God.' So the 'first' and the 'after that' reveal to us the very depth of Christ's work, and carry in them not only important teaching as to that, but equally important directions and guides for Christian conduct; and it is to this aspect of my text, and this only, that I ask your attention now.

The order which we have here, 'first of all King of righteousness, and after that King of peace,' is the order which I shall try to illustrate in two ways. First, in reference to Christ's work on the individual soul; second, in reference to Christ's work on society and communities.

First, then, here we have laid down the sequence in which

I. Christ comes with His operations and His gifts to the soul that clings to Him.

First 'righteousness... after... peace.' Now I need not do more than in a sentence remind you of the basis upon which the thoughts in the text, and all right understanding of Christ's work on an individual, repose, and that is that without righteousness no man can either be at peace with God or with himself. Not with God — for however shallow experience may talk effusively and gushingly about a God who is all mercy, and who loves and takes to His heart the sinner and the saint alike; such a God drapes the universe in darkness, and if there are no moral distinctions which determine whether a man is in amity or hostility with God, then 'the pillared firmament itself is rottenness, and earth's base built on stubble.' No, no, brethren; it sounds very tender and kindly; at bottom it is the cruellest thing that you can say, to say that without righteousness a man can please God. The sun is in the heavens, and whether there be mist and fog down here, or the bluest of summer skies, the sun is above. But its rays coming through the ethereal blue are warmth and blessedness, and its rays cut off by mists are dim, and itself turned into a lurid ball of fire. It cannot be — and thank God that it cannot — that it is all the same to Him whether a man is saint or sinner.

I do not need to remind you that in like manner righteousness must underlie peace with oneself. For it is true to-day, as it was long generations ago, according to the prophet, that 'the wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters throw up mire and dirt,' and, on the other hand, the promise is true still and for ever; 'O that thou hadst hearkened unto me, then had thy peace been like a river,' because 'thy righteousness' will be 'like the waves of the sea.' For ever and ever it stands true that for peace with God, and for a quiet heart, and a nature at harmony with itself, there must be righteousness.

Well, then, Jesus Christ comes to bring to a man the righteousness without which there can be no peace in his life. And that is the meaning of the great word which, having been taken for a shibboleth and 'test of a falling or a standing Church,' has been far too much ossified into a mere theological dogma, and has been weakened and misunderstood in the process. Justification by faith; that is the battle-cry of Protestant communities. And what does it mean? That I shall be treated as righteous, not being so? That I shall be forgiven and acquitted? Yes, thank God! But is that all that it means, or is that the main thing that it means? No, thank God! for the very heart of the Christian doctrine of righteousness is this, that if, and as soon as, a man puts his trembling trust in Jesus Christ as his Saviour, then he receives not merely pardon, which is the uninterrupted flow of the divine love in spite of his sin, nor an accrediting him with a righteousness which does not belong to him, but an imparting to him of that new life, a spark from the central fire of Christ's life, 'the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Do not suppose that the great message of the gospel is merely forgiveness. Do not suppose that its blessed gift is only that a man is acquitted because Christ has died. All that is true. But there is something more than that which is the basis of that other, and that is that by faith in Jesus Christ, I am so knit to Him — 'He that is joined to the Lord' being 'one spirit' — as that there passes into me, by His gift, a life which is created after His life, and is in fact cognate and kindred with it.

No doubt it is a mere germ, no doubt it needs cultivating, development, carefully guarding against gnawing insects and blighting frosts. But the seed which is implanted, though it be less than the least of all seeds, has in itself the promise and the potency of triumphant growth, when it will tower above all the poisonous shrubs and undergrowth of the forest, and have the light of heaven

resting on its aspiring top. Here is the great blessing and distinctive characteristic of Christian morality, that it does not say to a man: 'First aim after good deeds and so grow up into goodness,' but it starts with a gift, and says, 'Work from that, and by the power of that. "I make the tree good,"' says Jesus to us, 'do you see to it that the fruit is good.' No doubt the vegetable metaphor is inadequate, because the leaf is wooed from out the bud, and 'grows green and broad, and takes no care,' but that effortless growth is not how righteousness increases in men. The germ is given them, and they have to cultivate it. First, there must be the impartation of righteousness, and then there comes to the man's heart the sweet assurance of peace with God, and he has within him 'a conscience like a sea at rest, imaginations calm and fair.' 'First, King of righteousness; after that, King of peace.'

Now if we keep firm hold of this sequence, a great many of the popular objections to the gospel, as if it were merely a means of forgiveness and escape, and a system of reconciliation by some kind of forensic expedient, fall away of themselves, and a great many of the popular blunders that Christian people make fall away too. For there are good folks to whom the great truth that 'God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to them their trespasses,' and welcoming them to all the fulness of an overflowing love, has obscured the other truth that there is no peace for a Christian man continuous through his life, unless equally continuous through his life are his efforts to work out in acts the new nature which he has received.

Thus my text, by the order in which it places righteousness and peace, not only illuminates the work of Christ upon each individual soul, but comes with a very weighty and clear direction to Christian people as to their course of conduct. Are you looking for comfort? Is what you want to get out of your religion mainly the assurance that you will not go to hell? Is the great blessing that Christ brings to you only the blessing of pardon, which you degrade to mean immunity from punishment? You are wrong. 'First of all, King of righteousness' — let that which is first of all in His gifts be first of all in your efforts too; and do not seek so much for comfort as for grace to know and to do your duty, and strength to 'cast off the unfruitful works of darkness,' and to 'put on the armour of light.' The order which is laid down in my text was laid down with a different application, by our Lord Himself, and ought to be in both forms the motto for all Christian people.

'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things' — comfort, sense of reconciliation, assurance of forgiveness, joyful hope, and the like, as well as needful material good — 'shall be added unto you.'

And now, secondly, my text gives the order of.

II. Christ's work in the world, and of His servant's work after Him.

Of course, our Lord's work in the world is simply the aggregate of HIS work on individual souls. But for the sake of clearness we may consider these two aspects of it somewhat apart. In regard to this second part of my subject, I would begin, as I began in the former section, by reminding you that the only basis on which harmonious relations between men in communities, great or small, can be built, is righteousness, in the narrowest sense of the word, meaning thereby justice, equal dealing as between man and man, without partiality or class favouritism. Wherever you get an unjustly treated section or order of men, there you get the beginnings of war and strife. A social order built upon injustice, just in the measure in which it is so built, is based upon a quicksand which will suck it down, or on a volcano which will blow it to pieces. Injustice is the grit in the machine; you may oil it as much as you like with philanthropy and benevolence, but until you get the grit out, it will not work smoothly.

There is no harmony amongst men unless their association is based and bottomed upon righteousness.

Jesus Christ comes into the world to bring peace at the far end, but righteousness at the near end, and therefore strife. The herald angels sang peace upon earth. They were looking to the deepest and ultimate issues of His mission, but when He contemplated its immediate results He had to say, 'Suppose ye that I bring peace on earth? I tell you nay, but rather division.' He rode into Jerusalem 'the King, meek, and having salvation,' throned upon the beast of burden which symbolised peace. But He will come forth in the last fight, as He has been coming forth through all the ages, mounted on the white horse, with the sword girt upon His thigh in behalf of meekness and righteousness and truth. Christ, and Christianity when it keeps close to Christ, is a ferment, not an emollient. The full and honest application of Christ's teaching and principles to any society on the face of the earth at this day is bound to result in agitation and strife. There is no help for it. When a pure jet of water is discharged into a foul ditch, there will be much uprising of mud. Effervescence will always follow when Christ's principles are applied to existing institutions. And so it comes to pass that Christian men, in the measure in which they are true to their Master, turn the world upside down. There will follow, of course, the tranquillity that does follow on righteousness; but that is far ahead, and there is many a weary mile to be trod, and many a sore struggle to be undertaken, before the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and strife ends for ever.

Now, if this be so, then in this necessary characteristic of Christ's operation on the world, viz., disturbance arising from the endeavour to enthrone righteousness where its opposite has ruled 'there results very plainly important teaching as to the duties of Christ's servants to take their full share in the fight, to be the knights of the Holy Ghost, the champions of righteousness. The Church ought to lead in the van of all assaults on hoary wrongs or modern forms of unrighteousness in municipal, political, national

life. And it is the disgrace of the Church that so largely it leaves that contest to be waged by men who make no pretence to be Christians. There is, unfortunately, a type of Christian thinking and life, of which in many respects one would speak with all sympathy and admiration, which warns the Christian Church against casting itself into this contest, in the alleged interest of a superior spirituality and a loftier conception of Evangelical truth. I believe, as heartily as any man can — and I venture to appeal to those who hear me Sunday by Sunday, and from year to year, whether it is not so — that the preaching of Jesus Christ is the cure for all the world's miseries, and the banishment of all the world's unrighteousness; but am I to be told that the endeavour to apply the person and the principles of Jesus Christ, in His life and death, to existing institutions and evils, is not preaching Christ? I believe that it is, and that the one thing that the Church wants to-day is not less of holding up the Cross and the Sacrifice, but more of pointing to the Cross and the Sacrifice as the cure of all the world's evils, and the pattern for all righteousness.

It is difficult to do, it is made difficult by our own desire to be what the prophet did not think a very reputable position, 'at ease in Zion.' It is also made difficult by the way in which, as is most natural, the world, meaning thereby godless, organised society, regards an active Church that desires to bring its practices to the test of Christ's word- Muzzled watchdogs that can neither bark nor bite are much admired by burglars. And a Church that confines itself to theory, to what it calls religion, and leaves the world to go to the devil as it likes, suits both the world and the devil. There was once a Prime Minister of England who came out of church one Sunday morning in a state of towering indignation because the clergyman had spoken about conduct. And that is exactly how the world feels about an intrusive Church that will push its finger into all social arrangements, and say about each of them, 'This must be as Christ commanded.'

Brethren! would God that all Christian men deserved the name of 'troublers of Israel.' There was once a prophet to whom the men of his day indignantly said, 'O sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself in thy scabbard, rest and be still.' And the answer was the only possible one, 'How can it be quiet, seeing that the Lord hath appointed it?' If you and I are Christ's servants, we shall follow the sequence of His operations, and seek to establish righteousness first and then peace. The true Salem is above.

**'My soul, there is a country
Afar beyond the stars.'**

There 'sweet peace sits crowned with smiles.' The swords will then be wreathed with laurel and men 'shall learn war no more,' for the King has fought the great fight, 'and of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end... in righteousness and justice, from henceforth even for ever.' Let us take Him for 'the Lord our righteousness,' and we shall blessedly find that 'this Man is our peace.' Let us take arms in the Holy War which He wages, and we shall have peace in our hearts whilst the fight is sorest. Let us labour to 'be found in Him... having the righteousness which is of God by faith,' and then we shall 'be found in Him in peace, without spot, blameless.'

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Hebrews 7:26 The Priest Whom We Need

'Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate sinners, and made higher than the heavens.'
— Hebrews 7:26

'IT became Him to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings.' 'In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.' 'Such an High Priest became us.' In these three sayings Of this Epistle the historical facts of the gospel are considered as corresponding to or in accordance and congruity with, respectively, the divine nature; Christ's character and purpose; and man's need. I have considered the two former texts in previous sermons, and now I desire to deal with this latter. It asserts that Jesus Christ, regarded as the High Priest, meets the deepest wants of every heart, and fits human necessity as the glove does the hand. He is the answer to all our questions, the satisfaction of all our wants, the bread for our hunger, the light for our darkness, the strength for our weakness, the medicine for our. sickness, the life for our death. 'Such a High Priest became us.'

But the other side is quite as true. Christianity is in full accordance with men's wants, Christianity is in sharp antagonism with a great deal which men suppose to be their wants. Men's wishes, desires, readings of their necessities and conceptions of what is in accordance with the divine nature, are not to be taken without more ado as being the guides of what a revelation from God ought to be. The two characteristics of correspondence and opposition must both unite, in all that comes to us certified as being from God. There is an 'offence of the Cross'; and Christ, for all His correspondence with the deepest necessities of human nature, and I might even say just by reason of that correspondence, will be 'to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness.' If a message professing to be from God had not the discord between man's expectations and its facts, a message so like a man's would bear upon its front the evidence that it was of man. It a message professing to be from God had not the correspondence with man's deepest wants, a message so unlike

men would bear upon its front the evidence that it was not of God.

So then, remembering the necessary complementary thought to this of my text that 'such a high priest became us,' there are two or three considerations springing from the words that I desire to suggest.

I. The first of them is this — we all need a priest, and we have the priest we need in Jesus Christ.

The outstanding fact in reference to human nature in this connection is that it is a sinful nature. We have all departed from the path of rectitude and have nourished desires and tastes and purposes which do not rend us apart from God, and between us and Him do interpose a great barrier. Our consciences need a priest, or rather they say 'Amen' to the necessity born of our sins, that there shall stand between us and God 'a great High Priest.' I need not elaborate or enlarge upon this matter. The necessity of Christ's sacerdotal character, and the adaptation of that character to men's deepest wants, are not only to be argued about, but we have to appeal to men's consciences, and try to waken them to an adequate and profound sense of the reality and significance of the fact of transgression. If once a man comes to feel, what is true about him, that he is in God's sight a sinful man; to regard that fact in all its breadth, in all its consequences, in all its depth, there will not want any more arguing to make him see that a gospel which deals primarily with the fact of sin, and proclaims a priest whose great work is to offer a sacrifice, is the gospel that he needs.

In fair weather, when the summer seas are sunny and smooth, and all the winds are sleeping in their caves, the life-belts on the deck of a steamer may be thought to be unnecessary, but when she strikes on the black-toothed rocks, and all about is a hell of noise and despair, then the meaning of them is understood. When you are amongst the breakers you will need a life-buoy. When the flames are flickering round you, you will understand the use and worth of a fire-escape, and when you have learned what sort of a man you are, and what that involves in regard of your relations to God, then the mysteries which surround the thought of the high priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be accepted as mysteries, and left where they are, and the fact will be grasped with all the tendrils of your soul as the one hope for you in life and in death.

I do not care to argue a man out of his imperfect apprehensions, if he have them, of the mission and work of Jesus Christ. But oh, dear friends! you for whose blood I am in some sense responsible, let me plead with you this one thought — you have not taken the point of view from which to judge of the gospel until you have stood in the perfect rectitude of heaven and contrasted your blackness with its stainless purity, and its solemn requirements; and have looked all round the horizon to see if anywhere there is a means by which a sinful soul can be liberated from the dragon's sting of conscience, and from the crushing burden of guilt, and set upon a rock, emancipated and cleansed. We need a priest because we are sinful men, and sin means separation in fact and alienation in spirit, and the entail of dreadful consequences, which, as far as Nature is concerned, cannot be prevented from coming. And so sin means that if men are to be brought again into the fellowship and the family of God, it must be through One who, being a true priest, offers a real sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The new science of comparative religion has been made by some of its adepts to bear witness unfavorably to the claims of Christianity. A far truer use of it would be this — Wherever men have worshipped, they have worshipped at an altar, there has been on it a sacrifice offered by a purged hand that symbol seal moral purity. And all these are witnesses that humanity recognises the necessity which my text Affirms has been met in Christ. Some people would say 'Yes! and your doctrine of a Christ who is sacrifice and priest, has precisely the same origin as those altars, many smoking with sacrifices to tyrannical gods.' But to me the relation between the faiths of the world and the gospel of Christ, in reference to this matter, is much rather this, that they proclaim a want, and that Christ brings the satisfaction of it; that they with one voice cry, 'Oh! that I knew where I might find Him! How shall a man be just with God?' and that the Cross of Christ answers their longings, and offers the means by which we may draw nigh to God. 'Such a High Priest became us.'

II. We may take another consideration from these words, viz. — We need for a priest a perfect man, and we have the perfect priest whom we need, in Jesus Christ.

The writer goes on to enumerate a series of qualities by which our Lord is constituted the priest we need. Of these five qualities which follow in my text, the three former are those to which I now refer. 'He is holy, harmless, undefiled.'

Now I do not need to spend time in discussing the precise meaning of these words, but a remark or two about each of them may perhaps be admissible. Taken generally, these three characteristics refer to the priest's relation to God, to other men, and to the law of purity. 'He is holy'; that is to say, not so much morally free from guilt as standing in a certain relation to God. The word here used for 'holy' has a special meaning. It is the representative of an old Testament word, which seems to mean 'Devoted to God in love.' And it expresses not merely the fact of consecration, but the motive and the means of that consecration, as being the result of God's love or mercy which kindles self-surrendering love in the recipient. Such is the first qualification for a priest, that he shall be knit to God by loving devotion, and have a heart throbbing in unison with the divine heart in all its tenderness of pity and in all its nobleness and loftiness of purity.

And, besides being thus the earthly echo and representative of the whole sweetness of the divine nature, so, in the next place, the priest we need must, in relation to men, be harmless — without malice, guile, unkindness; a Lamb of God, with neither horns to butt, nor teeth to tear, nor claws to wound, but gentle and gracious, sweet and compassionate; or, as we read in another place in this same letter, 'a merciful High Priest in things pertaining to God.' And the priest that we need to bridge over the gulf between us sinful and alienated men and God, must not only be one knit to God in all sympathy, and representing His purity and tenderness amongst us; nor must the priest that we need by reason of our miseries, our sorrows, our weaknesses, our bleeding wounds, our broken hearts, be only a priest filled with compassion and merciful, who can lay a gentle hand upon our sore and sensitive spirits, but the priest that we men, spattered and befouled with the mire and filth of sin, which has left deep stains upon our whole nature, need, must be one 'undefiled,' on whose white garments there shall be no speck; on the virgin purity of whose nature there shall be no stain; who shall stand above us, though He be one of us, and whilst 'it behoves Him to be made in all points like unto His brethren,' shall yet be 'without blemish and without spot.'

'It behoved Him to be made like unto HIS brethren.' The priest of the world must be like the world. My text says, 'Yes! and He must be absolutely unlike the world.' Now, is this not a strange thing — this is a digression, but it may be allowed for one moment — is it not a strange thing that in these four little tracts which we call gospels, that might all be printed upon two sides of a penny newspaper, you get drawn; with such few strokes, a picture which harmonises, in a possible person, these two opposite requirements, the absolute unlikeness and the perfect likeness? Think of how difficult it would be if it was not a copy from life, to draw a figure with these two characteristics harmonised. What geniuses the men must have been that wrote the gospels, if they were not something much simpler than that, honest witnesses who told exactly what they saw! The fact that the life and death of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Scripture, present this strange combination of two opposite requirements in the most perfect harmony and beauty, is in my eyes no contemptible proof of the historical veracity of the picture which is presented to us. If the life was not lived I, for one, do not believe that it ever could have been invented.

But that, as I said, has nothing to do with my present subject. And so I pass on just to notice, in a word, how this assemblage of qualifications which, taken together, make up the idea of a perfect man, is found in Jesus Christ for a certain purpose, and a purpose beyond that which some of you, I am afraid, are accustomed to regard. Why this innocence; this God- devotedness; this blamelessness; this absence of all selfish antagonism?

Why this life, so sweet, so pure, so gentle, so running over with untainted and ungrudging compassion, so conscious of unbroken and perfect communion and sympathy with God? Why? That He might, 'through the Eternal Spirit, offer Himself without spot unto God'; and that by His one offering He might perfect for ever all them that put their trust in Him.

Oh, brother! you do not understand the meaning of Christ's innocence unless you see in it the condition of efficiency of His sacrifice. It is that He might be the priest of the world that He wears this fine linen clean and white, the righteousness of a pure and perfect soul.

I beseech you, then, ponder for yourselves the meaning of this admitted fact. We all acknowledge His purity. We all adore, in some sense of the word, His perfect manhood. If the one stainless and sinless man that the world has ever seen had such a life and such a death as is told in these gospels, they are no gospels, except on one supposition. But for it they are the most despairing proclamation of the old miserable fact that righteousness suffers in the world. The life of Christ, if He be the pure and perfect man that we believe Him to be, and not the perfect priest offering up a pure sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is the most damning indictment that was ever drawn up against the blunders of a Providence that so misgoverns the world.

'He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.' And, therefore, when we look upon His sufferings, in life and in death, we can only understand them and the relation of His innocence to the divine heart when we say: 'Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He hath put Him to grief,' 'by His stripes we are healed. Such a priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled'; the sacrificial Lamb, without blemish and without spot.

III. Lastly, my text suggests that we need a priest in the heavens, and we have in Christ the heavenly priest whom we need.

The two last qualifications for the priestly office included in my text are, 'separate from sinners; made higher than the heavens.' Now, the 'separation' intended, is not, as I suppose, Christ's moral distance from evil-doers, but has what I may call a kind of half-local signification, and is explained by the next clause. He is 'separate from sinners' not because He is pure and they foul, but because having offered His sacrifice He has ascended up on high.

He is 'made higher than the heavens.' Scripture sometimes speaks of the living Christ as at present in the heavens, and at others as having 'passed through' and being 'high above all heavens'; in the former case simply giving the more general idea of exaltation, in the latter the thought that He is lifted, in His manhood and as our priest, above the bounds of the material and visible creation, and 'set at the right hand of the Majesty on high.'

Such a priest we need. His elevation and separation from us upon earth is essential to that great and continual work of His which we call, for want of any more definite name, His intercession. The High Priest in the heavens presents His sacrifice there for ever. The past fact of His death on the Cross for the sins of the whole world is ever present as an element determining the direction of the divine dealings with all them that put their trust in Him. That sacrifice was not once only offered upon the Cross, but is ever, in the symbolical language of Scripture, presented anew in the heavens by Him. No time avails to corrupt or weaken the efficacy of that blood; and He has offered one sacrifice for Sins for ever. Such a priest we need, to-day, presenting the sacrifice which, today, in our weakness and sinfulness, we require.

We need a priest who in the heavens bears us in His heart. As His type in the Old Testament economy entered within the veil with the blood; and when he passed within the curtain and stood before the Light of the Shekinah, had on his breast and on his shoulders, — the home of love, the seat of strength — the names of the tribes, graven on flashing stones, so our priest within the veil has your name and mine, if we love Him, close by His heart, governing the flow of His love, and written on His shoulders, and on the palms of His pierced hands, that all His strength may be granted to us. ‘Such a priest became us.’

And we need a priest separated from the world, lifted above the limitations of earth and time, wielding the powers of divinity in the hands that once were laid in blessing on the little children’s heads. And such a priest we have. We need a priest in the heavens, whose presence there makes that strange country our home; and by whose footstep, passing through the gates and on to the golden pavements, the gate is open for us, and our faltering poor feet can tread there. And such a priest we have, passed within the veil, that to-day, in aspiration and prayer; and to-morrow in reality and person, where He is, there we may be also. ‘Such a priest became us.’

We need no other; we do need Him. Oh, friend! are you resting on that sacrifice? Have you given Your cause into His hands to plead? Then the great High Priest will make you too His priest to offer a thank-offering, and Himself will present for ever the sacrifice that takes away your sin and brings you near to God. ‘It is Christ that died, yea I rather, that is risen again’; and whose death and resurrection alike led on to His ascension to the right hand of God, where for ever ‘He maketh intercession for us.’

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Hebrews 8:1, 2 The Enthroned Servant Christ

‘We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2. A minister of the sanctuary.’ — Hebrews 8:1, 2

A LITTLE consideration will show that we have in these words two, strikingly different representations of our Lord’s heavenly state. In the one He is regarded as seated ‘on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty.’ In the other He is regarded as being, notwithstanding that session, a ‘minister of the sanctuary’; performing priestly functions there. This combination of two such opposite ideas is the very emphasis and force of the passage. The writer would have us think of the royal repose of Jesus as full of activity for us; and of His heavenly activity as consistent with deepest repose. Resting He works; working He rests. Reigning He serves; serving He reigns. So my purpose is simply to deal with these two representations, and to seek to draw from them and from their union the lessons that they teach.

I. Note, then, first, the seated Christ.

‘We have a high priest who’ — to translate a little more closely — ‘has taken His seat on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.’ ‘Majesty’ is a singular expression or periphrasis for God. It is used once again in this letter, and seems probably to have been derived by the writer from the Rabbinical usage of his times, when, as we know, a certain misplaced, and yet most natural, reverential or perhaps superstitious awe, made men unwilling to name the mighty name, and inclined rather to fall back upon other forms of speech to express it.

So the writer here, addressing Hebrews, steeped in Rabbinical thought, takes one of their own words and speaks of God as the ‘Majesty in the heavens’; emphasising the idea of sovereignty, power, illimitable magnificence. ‘At the right hand’ of this throned personal abstraction, ‘the Majesty,’ sits the Man Christ Jesus.

Now the teaching, both of this Epistle to the Hebrews and of the whole New Testament, in reference to the state of our exalted Lord, is that His manhood is elevated to this supreme dignity. The Eternal Word who was with the Father in the beginning, before all the worlds, went back to ‘the glory which He had with the Father.’ But the new thing was that there went, too, that human nature which Jesus Christ indissolubly united with divinity in the mystery of the lowliness of His earthly life. An ancient prophet foretold that ‘in the Messianic times there should spring from the cut-down stump of the royal house of Israel a sucker which, feeble at first, and in strange contrast with the venerable ruin from which it arose, should grow so swiftly, so tall and strong, that it should become an ensign for the nations of the world; and then, he adds, ‘and His resting-place shall be glory.’ There was a deeper meaning in the

words, I suppose, than the prophet knew, and we shall not be chargeable with forcing New Testament ideas upon Old Testament words which are a world too narrow for them, if we say that there is at least shadowed the great thought that the lowly manhood, sprung from the humbled royal stock, shall grow up as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, and be lifted to find its rest and dwelling-place in the very central blaze of the divine glory. We have a High Priest who, in His manhood, in which He is knit to us, hath taken His seat on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

Then, again, remember that whilst in such representations as this we have to do with realities set forth under the symbols of time and place, there is yet a profound sense in which that session of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God proclaims both the localisation of His present corporeal humanity and the ubiquity of His presence. For what is 'the right hand of God'? What is it but the manifestation of His energies, the forthputting of His power? And where is that but everywhere, where He makes Himself known? Wheresoever divine activity is manifested, there is Jesus Christ. But yet, though this be true, and though it may be difficult for us to hold the balance and mark the dividing line between symbol and reality, we are not to forget that the facts of Christ's wearing now a real though glorified body, and of His visible corporeal ascension, and the promise of a similar visible corporeal return to earth at the end of the days seem to require the belief that, above all the heavens, and filling all things, as that exalted manhood is, there is yet what we must call a place, wherein that glorified body now abides. And thus both the awful majestic idea of omnipresence, and the no less majestic idea of the present localisation in place of the glorified Christ, are taught us in the text.

And what is the deepest meaning of it all? What means that majestic session at 'the right hand of the throne'? Before that throne 'angels veil their faces.' If in action, they stand; if in adoration, they fall before Him.

Creatures bow prostrate. Who is He that, claiming and exercising a power which in a creature is blasphemy and madness, takes His seat in that awful presence? Other words of Scripture represent the same idea in a still more wonderful form when they speak of 'the throne of God and of the Lamb,' and when He Himself speaks from heaven of Himself as 'set down with My Father on His throne.'

If we translate the symbol into colder words, it means that deep repose, which, like the divine rest after creation, is not for recuperation of exhausted powers, but is the sign of an accomplished purpose and achieved task, a share in the sovereignty of heaven, and the wielding of the energies of deity — rest, royalty, and power belong now to the Man sitting at the right hand of the throne of God.

II. Note, secondly, the servant Christ.

A minister of the sanctuary; says my text. Now the word employed here for 'minister,' and which I have ventured variously to translate servant, means one who discharges some public official act of service either to God or man, and it is especially, though by no mean, exclusively, employed in reference to the service of a ministering priest.

The allusion in the second portion of my text is plainly enough to the ritual of the great day of atonement, on which the high priest once a year went into the holy place; and there, in the presence of God throned between the cherubim, made atonement for the sins of the people, by the offering of the blood of the sacrifice. Thus, says our writer, that throned and sovereign Man who, in token of His accomplished work, and in the participation of deity, sits hard by the throne of God, is yet ministering at one and the same time within the veil, and presenting the might of His own sacrifice.

Put away the metaphor and we just come to this, a truth which is far too little dwelt upon in this generation, that the work which Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross, all sufficient and eternal as it was in the range and duration of its efficacy, is not all His work. The past, glorious as it is, needs to be supplemented by the present, no less wonderful and glorious, in which Jesus Christ within the veil, in manners all unknown to us, by His presence there in the power of the sacrifice that He has made, brings down upon men the blessings that flow from that sacrifice. It is not enough that the offering should be made. The deep teaching, the whole reasonableness of which it does not belong to us here and now to apprehend, but which faith will gladly grasp as a fact, though reason may not be able to answer the question of the why or how, tells us that the interceding Christ must necessarily take up the work of the suffering Christ. Dear brethren, our salvation is not so secured by the death upon the Cross as to make needless the life beside the throne. Jesus that died is the Christ 'that is risen again, who is even at, the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for

us.'

But, beyond that, may I remind you that my text, though not in its direct bearing, yet in its implication, suggests to us other ways in which the rest of Christ is full of activity. 'I am among you as He that serveth' is true for the heavenly glory of the exalted Lord quite as much as for the lowly humiliation of His life upon earth. And no more really did He stoop to serve when, laying aside His garments, He girded Himself with the towel, and wiped the disciples' feet, than He does to-day when, having resumed the garments of His glorious divinity, and having seated Himself in His place of authority above us, He comes forth, according to the wonderful condescension of His own parable, to serve His servants who have entered into rest, and those also who still toil. The glorified

Christ is a ministering Christ. In us, on us, for us He works, in all the activities of His exalted repose, as truly and more mightily than He did when here He helped the weaknesses and healed the sicknesses, and soothed the sorrows and supplied the wants, and washed the feet, of a handful of poor men.

He has gone up on high, but in His rest He works. He is on the throne, but in His royalty He serves. He is absent from us, but His power is with us. The world's salvation was accomplished when He cried, 'It is finished!' But 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' and they who saw Him ascend into the heavens, and longingly followed the diminishing form as it moved slowly upward, with hands extended in benediction, as they turned away, when there was nothing more to be seen but the cloud, 'went everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

So then, let us ever hold fast, inextricably braided together, the rest and the activity, the royalty and the service, of the glorified Son of Man.

III. And now, in the last place, let me point to one or two of the practical lessons of such thoughts as these.

They have a bearing on the three categories of past, present, future. For the past a seal, for the present a strength, for the future a prophecy.

For the past a seal. If it be true — and there are few historical facts the evidence for which is more solid or valid — that Jesus Christ really went up into the heavens, and abode there, then that is God's last and most emphatic declaration, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' The trail of light that He leaves behind Him, as He is borne onwards, falls on the Cross, and tells us that it is the centre of the world's history. For what can be greater, what can afford a firmer foundation for us sinful men to rest our confidence upon, than the death of which the recompense was that the Man who died sits on the throne of the universe? Brethren! an ascended Christ forces us to believe in an atoning Christ. No words can exaggerate, nor can any faith exalt too highly, or trust too completely, the sacrifice which led straight to that exaltation. Read the Cross by the light of the throne. Let Olivet interpret Calvary, and we shall understand what Calvary means.

Again, this double representation of my text is a strength for the present. I know of nothing that is mighty enough to draw men's desires and fix solid reasonable thought and love upon that awful future, except the belief that Christ is there. I think that the men who have most deeply realised what a solemn, and yet what a vague and impalpable thing the conception of immortal life beyond the grave is, will be most ready to admit that the thought is cold, cheerless, full of blank misgivings and of waste places, in which the speculative spirit feels itself very much a foreigner. There is but one thought that flashes warmth into the coldness, and turns the awfulness and the terror of the chilling magnificence into attractiveness and homelikeness and sweetness, and that is that Christ is there sitting at the right hand of God. Foreign lands are changed in their aspect to us when we have brothers and sisters there; and our Brother has gone whither we too, when we send our thoughts after Him, can feel that our home is, because there He is. The weariness of existence here is only perpetuated and intensified when we think of it as prolonged for ever. But with Christ in the heavens, the heavens become the home of our hearts.

In like manner, if we only lay upon our spirits as a solid reality, and keep ever clear before us, as a plain fact, the present glory of Jesus Christ and His activity for us, oh! then life becomes a different thing, sorrows lose their poison and their barb, cares become trivial, anxieties less gnawing, the weights of duty or of suffering less burdensome; and all things have a new aspect and a new aim. If you and I, dear friends, can see the heavens opened, and Jesus on the throne, how petty, how unworthy to fix our desires, or to compel our griefs, will all the things here below seem. We then have the true standard, and the littlenesses that swell themselves into magnitude when there is nothing to compare them with will shrink into their insignificance. Lift the mists and let the Himalayas shine out; and what then about the little molehills in the foreground, that looked so big whilst the great white mass was invisible? See Christ, and He interprets, dwindles, and yet ennobles the world and life.

Lastly, such a vision gives us a prophecy for the future. There is the measure of the possibilities of human nature. A somewhat arrogant saying affirms, 'Whatever a man has done, a man can do.' Whatever that Man is, I may be. It is possible that humanity may be received into the closest union with divinity, and it is certain that if we knit ourselves to Jesus Christ by simple faith and lowly, obedient love, whatever He is He will give to us to share. 'Even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne,' is His own measure of what He will do for the men who are faithful and obedient to Him.

I do not say that there is no other adequate proof of immortality than the facts of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. I do not know that I should be far wrong if I ventured even on that assertion. But I do say that there is no means by which a poor sinful soul will reach the realisation of the possibilities that open to it, except faith in Jesus Christ. If we love Him, anything unreasonable and impossible is more reasonable and possible than that the Head shall be glorified and the members left to see corruption. If I am wedded to Jesus Christ, as you all may be if you will trust your souls to Him and love Him, then God will take us and Him as one into the glory of His presence, where we may dwell with and in Christ, in indissoluble union through the ages of eternity.

My text is the answer to all doubts and fears for ourselves. It shows us what the true conception of a perfect heaven is, the perfection of rest and the perfection of service. As Christ's heaven is the fulness of repose and of activity, so shall that of His servants be. 'His servants shall serve Him' — there is the activity — 'and see His face' — there is the restful contemplation — 'and His name shall be in their foreheads' — there is the full participation in His character and glory.

And so, dear brethren, for the world and for ourselves, hope is duty and despair is sin. Here is the answer to the question, Can I ever enter that blessed land? Here is the answer to the question, Is the dream of perfected manhood ever to be more than a dream? 'We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus,' and, seeing Him, no hope is absurd, and anything but hope is falling beneath our privileges. Then, dear friends, let us look unto Him who, 'for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the Throne of God.'

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Hebrews 8:5 The True Ideal

'See (saith He) that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.' — Hebrews 8:5

I DO not intend to deal with the original bearing of these words, nor with the use made of them by the writer of Hebrews. Primarily they refer to the directions as to the Tabernacle and its furniture, which are given at such length, and with such minuteness, in Leviticus, and are there said to have been received by Moses on Sinai. The author of this Epistle attaches an even loftier significance to them, as supporting his contention that the whole ceremonial worship, as well as the Temple and its equipment, was a copy of heavenly realities, the heavenly sanctuary and its altar and priest. I wish to take a much humbler view of the injunction, and to apply it, with permissible violence, as a maxim for conduct and the great rule for the ordering of our lives. 'See that thou,' in thy shop and office, and wherever thou mayst be, 'make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.' A far-reaching, high-soaring commandment, not to be obeyed without much effort, and able to revolutionise the lives of most of us. There are three points in it: the pattern, its universal applicability, and the place where we get to see it.

I. The pattern.

The difference between noble and ignoble lives is very largely that the one has — and seeks, however partially and interruptedly, to follow — an ideal and the other has not. Or, to put it into plainer words, the one man regulates his life according to momentary inclinations and the obvious calls of sense, business and the like, and the other man has, far ahead and high up, a great light burning, to which he is ever striving to attain. The one has an aim to which he can only approximate, and the other largely lives from hand to mouth, as circumstances and sense, and the recurring calls of material necessities, or temptations that are put in his way every day, may dictate. And so, the one turns out a poor creature, and the other — God helping him — may turn out a saint. Which are you? Which we are depends very largely on the clearness with which we keep before us — like some great mountain summit rising above the mists, and stirring the ambition of every climber to reach the peak, where foot has never trod — the ideal, to use modern language, or to fall back upon the good old-fashioned Bible words, 'the pattern shewed to us.'

You know that in mountain districts the mists are apt to gather their white folds round the summits, and that often for many days the dwellers in the plains have to plod along on their low levels, without a glimpse of the calm peak. And so it is with our highest ideal. Earth-born mists from the undrained swamps in our own hearts hide it too often from our eyes, and even when that is not the case, we are like many a mountaineer, who never lifts an eye to the sacred summit overhead, nor looks higher than his own fields and cattle-sheds. So it needs an effort to keep clear before us the pattern that is high above us, and to make very plain to ourselves, and very substantial in our thoughts, the unattained and untrodden heights. 'Not in vain the distance' should 'beckon.' 'Forward, forward, let us range,' should always be our word. 'See that thou make all things after the pattern,' and do not rule your lives according to whim, or fancy, or inclination, or the temptations of sense and circumstances.

To aim at the unreachd is the secret of perpetual youth. No man is old as long as he aspires. It is the secret of perpetual growth. No man stagnates till he has ceased to see, or to believe in great dim possibilities for character, as yet unrealised. It is the secret of perpetual blessedness. No man can be desolate who has for his companion the unreachd self that he may become. And so artist, poet, painter, all live nobler lives than they otherwise would, because they live, not so much with the commonplace realities round them, as with noble ideals, be they of melody or of beauty, or of musical words and great thoughts. There should be the same life with, and directed towards, attaining the unstrained in the moralist, and above all in the Christian.

But then, do not let us forget that we are not here in our text, as I am using it in this sermon, relegated to a pattern which takes its origin, after all, in our own thoughts and imaginations. The poet's ideal, the painter's ideal, varies according to his genius. Ours has taken solidity and substance and a human form, and stands before us, and says: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.' 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern,' and be thankful that we are not left to our own thoughts, or to our brethren's

teachings, or to abstract ideas of the true and the beautiful and the good for our pattern and mould of life, but that we have the law embodied in a Person, and the ideal made actual, in our Brother and our Saviour. There is the joy and the blessedness of the Christian aim after Christian perfection. There is something unsubstantial, misty, shadowy, in an ideal which is embodied nowhere. It is ghost-like, and has little power to move or to attract. But for Christians the pattern is all gathered into the one sweet, heart-compelling form of Jesus, and whatever is remote and sometimes cold in the thought of an unattained aim, changes when we make it our supreme purpose to be like Jesus Christ. Our goal is no cold, solitary mountain top. It is the warm, loving heart, and companionable purity and perfectness of our Brother, and when we can, even in a measure, reach that sweet resting-place, we are wrapped in the soft atmosphere of His love.

We shall be like Him when we see Him as He is; we grow like Him here, in the measure in which we do see Him, even darkly. We reach Him most surely by loving Him, and we become like Him most surely by loving Him, for love breeds likeness, and they who live near the light are drenched with the light, and become lights in their turn.

There is another point here that I would suggest, and that is

II. The universal applicability of the pattern — ‘See that thou make all things.’

Let us go back to Leviticus. There you will find page after page that reads like an architect's specification. The words that I have taken as my text are given in immediate connection with the directions for making the seven-branched candlestick, which are so minute and specific and detailed, that any brass-founder in Europe could make one to-day ‘after the pattern.’ So many bowls, so many knops, so many branches; such and such a distance between each of them; and all the rest of it — there it is, in most prosaic minuteness. Similarly, we read how many threads and fringes, and how many bells on the high priest's robe. Verse after verse is full of these details; and then, on the back of them all, comes, ‘See that thou make all things according to the pattern.’ Which things are a parable — and just come to this, that the minutest pieces of daily life, the most commonplace and trivial incidents, may all be moulded after that great example, the life of Jesus Christ.

It is one of the miracles of revelation that it should be so. The life of Jesus Christ, in the fragmentary records of it in these four Gospels, although it only covered a few years, and is very imperfectly recorded, and in outward form was passed under conditions most remote from the strange complex conditions of our civilisation, yet fits as closely as a glove does to the hand, to all the necessities of our daily lives. Men and women, young men and maidens, old men and children, professional men and students, women in their houses, men of business, merchants, and they that sail the sea and they that dig in the mine; they may all find directions for everything that they have to do, in that one life.

And here is the centre and secret of it. ‘Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.’ Therefore that which is the law for Jesus is the law for us, and the next verse goes on; ‘he that loveth his life shall lose it,’ and the next verse hammers the nail farther in: ‘If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.’ — Take that injunction and apply it, in all the details of daily life, and you will be on the road to reproduce the pattern. But remember the ‘all things.’ It is for us, if we are Christian people, to bring the greatest principles to bear on the smallest duties, ‘Small duties?’ ‘Great’ and ‘small’ are adjectives that ought never to be tacked on to ‘duty.’ For all duties are of one size, and while we may speak, and often do speak, very mistakenly about things which we vulgarly consider ‘great,’ or superciliously treat as ‘small,’ the fact is that no man can tell what is a great thing, and what is a small one. For the most important crises in a man's life have a strange knack of leaping up out of the smallest incidents; just as a whisper may start an avalanche, and so nobody can tell what are the great things and what the small ones. The tiniest pin in a machine drops out, and all the great wheels stop. The small things are the things that for the most part make up life. You can apply Christ's example to the least of them, and there is very small chance of your applying it to the great things if you have not been in the way of applying it to the small ones. For the small things make the habits which the great ones test and require.

So ‘thorough’ is the word. ‘See that thou make all things according to the pattern.’

I remember once going up to the roof of Milan Cathedral, and finding there stowed away behind a buttress — where I suppose one man in fifty years might notice it, a little statuette, as completely chiselled, as perfectly polished, as if it had been of giant size, and set in the facade for all the people in the piazza to see. That is the sort of way in which Christian men should carve out their lives. Finish off the unseen bits perfectly, and then you may be quite sure that the seen bits will take care of themselves. ‘See that thou make all things’ — and begin with the small ones — ‘according to the pattern.’

Lastly,

III. Where we are to see the pattern. — ‘Shewed to thee in the mount.’

Ay, that is where we have to go if we are to see it. The difference between Christian men's convictions of duty depends largely on the difference in the distance that they have climbed up the hill. The higher you go, the better you see the He of the land. The higher you go, the purer and more wholesome the atmosphere. And many a thing which a Christian man on the low levels thought

to be perfectly in accordance with 'the pattern,' when he goes up a little higher, he finds to be hopelessly at variance with it. It is of no use to lay down a multitude of minute, red-tape regulations as to what Christian morality requires from people in given circumstances. Go up the hill, and you will see for yourselves.

Our elevation determines our range of vision. And the nearer, and the closer, and the deeper is our habitual fellowship with God in Christ, the more lofty will be our conceptions of what we ought to be and do. The reason for inconsistent lives is imperfect communion, mad the higher we go on the mountain of vision, the dearer will be our vision. On the other hand, whilst we see 'the pattern' in the mount, we have to come down into the valley to 'make' the 'things.' The clay and the potter's wheels are down in Hinnom, and the mountain top is above. You have to carry your pattern- book down, and set to work with it before you. Therefore, whilst the way to see the pattern is to climb, the way to copy it is to descend. And having faithfully copied what you saw on the Mount of Vision, you will see more the next time you go back; for 'to him that hath shall be given.'

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Hebrews 8:10 The Articles of the New Covenant: God's Welting on the Heart

'I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.' —Hebrews 8:10

WE can scarcely estimate the shock to a primitive Hebrew Christian when he discovered that Judaism was to fade away. Such an earthquake might seem to leave nothing standing. Now, the great object of this Epistle is to insist on that truth, and to calm the early Hebrew Christians under it, by showing them that the disappearance of the older system left them no poorer but infinitely richer, inasmuch as all that was in it was more perfectly in Christ's gospel. The writer has accordingly been giving his strength to showing that, all along the line, Christianity is the perfecting of Judaism, in its Founder, in its priesthood, in its ceremonies, in its Sabbath. Here he touches the great central thought of the covenant between God and man, and he fall back upon the strange words of one of the old prophets. Jeremiah had declared as emphatically as he, the writer, has been declaring, that the ancient system was to melt away and be absorbed in a new covenant between God and man. Is there any other instance of a religion which, on the one side, proclaims its own eternal duration — 'the Word of the Lord endureth for ever' — and on the other side declares that it is to be abrogated, antiquated, and done away? The writer of the Epistle had learned from sacred lips than Jeremiah's the same lesson, for the Master said at the most solemn hour of His career, 'This is the blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'

These articles of the New Covenant go very deep into the essence of Christianity, and may well be thought. fully pondered by us all, if we wish to know what the specific differences between the ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ, and all other systems are. The words I have read for my text are the first of these articles.

I. Let us try to ascertain what exactly is the meaning of this great promise.

Now it seems to me that the two clauses which I have read for my text are not precisely parallel, but parallel with a difference. I take it, that 'mind' here means very much what we make it mean in our popular phraseology, a kind of synonym for the understanding, or the intellectual part of a man's nature; and that 'heart,' on the other hand, means something a little wider than it does in our popular phraseology, and indicates not only the affections, but the centre of personality in the human will, as well as the seat of love. So these two clauses will mean, you see, if we carry that distinction with us, two things — the clear perception of the will of God, and the coincidence of that will with our inclinations and desires.' In men's natural consciences, there is the law written on their minds, but alas! we all know that there is an awful chasm between perception and inclination, and that it is one thing to know our duty, and quite another to wish to do it. So the heart of this great promise of my text is that these two things shall coincide in a Christian man, shall cover precisely the same ground; as two of Euclid's triangles having the same angles will, if laid upon each other, coincide line for line and angle for angle. Thus, says this great promise, it is possible — and, if we observe the conditions, it will be actual in us — that knowledge and will shall cover absolutely and exactly the same ground. Inclination will be duty, and duty will be inclination and delight. Nothing short of such a thought lies here.

And how is that wonderful change upon men to be accomplished? 'I will put, I will write.' Only He can do it. We all know, by our own experience, the schism that gapes between the two things. Every man in the world knows a vast deal more of duty than any man in the world does. The worst of us has a standard that rebukes his evil, and the best of us has a standard that transcends his goodness, and, alas! often transcends his inclination.

But the gospel of our Lord and Saviour comes armed with sufficient power to make this miracle an actuality for us all.

For it comes, does it not, to substitute for all other motives to obedience, the one motive of love? They but half understand the gospel who dwell upon its sanctions of reward and punishment, and would seek to frighten men into goodness by brandishing the whip of law before them, and uncovering the lid that shuts in the smoke of a hell And they misinterpret it almost as much, if there be

any such, who find the chief motive for Christian obedience in the glories of the heavenly state. These are subordinate and legitimate in their secondary place, but the gospel appeals to men, not merely nor chiefly on the ground of self-interest, but it comes to them with the one appeal, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.' That is how the law is written on the heart. Wherever there is love, there is a supreme delight in divining and in satisfying the wish and will of the beloved. His lightest word is law to the loving heart; his looks are spells and commandments. And if it is so in regard of our poor, imperfect, human loves, how infinitely more so is it where the heart is touched by true affection for His own infinite love's sake, of that 'Jesus' who is 'most desired!' The secret of Christian morality is that duty is changed into choice, because love is made the motive for obedience.

And, still further, let me remind you how this great promise is fulfilled in the Christian life, because to have Christ shined in the heart is the heart of Christianity, and Christ Himself is our law. So, in another sense than that which I have been already touching, the law is written on the heart on which, by faith and self-surrender, the name of Christ is written. And when it becomes our whole duty to become like Him, then He being throned in our hearts, our law is within, and Himself to His 'darlings' shall be, as the poet has it about another matter, 'both law and impulse.' Write His name upon your hearts, and your law of life is thereby written there.

And, still further, let me remind you that this great promise is fulfilled, because the very specific gift of Christianity to men is the gift of a new nature which is 'created in righteousness and holiness that flows from truth.' The communication of a divine life kindred with, and percipient of, and submissive to, the divine will is the gift that Christianity — or, rather, let us put away the abstraction and say that Christ — offers . to us all, and gives to every man who will accept it.

And thus, and in other ways on which I cannot dwell now, this great article of the New Covenant lies at the very foundation of the Christian life, and gives its peculiar tinge and cast to all Christian morality, commandment, and obligation.

But let me remind you how this great truth has to be held with caution. The evidence of this letter itself shows that, whilst the writer regarded it as a distinctive characteristic of the gospel, that by it men's wills were stamped with a delight in the law of God, and a transcript thereof, he still regarded these wills as unstable, as capable of losing the sharp lettering, of having the writing of God obliterated, and still regarded it as possible that there should be apostasy and departure.

So there is nothing in this promise which suspends the need for effort and for conflict. Still 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit.' Still there are parts of the nature on which that law is not written. It is the final triumph, that the whole man, body, soul, and spirit is, through and through, penetrated with, and joyfully obedient to, the commandments of the Lord. There is need, too, not only for continuous progress, effort, conflict, in order to keep our hearts open for His handwriting, but also for much caution, lest at any time we should mistake our own self-will for the utterance of the divine voice.

'Love, and do what thou wilt,' said a great Christian teacher. It is an unguarded statement, but profoundly true as in some respects it is, it is only absolutely true if we have made sure that the 'thou' which 'wills' is the heart on which God has written His law.

Only God can do this for us. The Israelites of old were bidden 'these things which I command thee this day shall be on thy heart,' and they were to write them on their hand, and on the frontlet between their eyes, and on their doorposts. The latter commands were obeyed, having been hardened into a form; and phylacteries on the arm, and scrolls on the lintel, were the miserable obedience which was given to them. But the complete writing on the heart was beyond the power of unaided man. A psalmist said, 'I delight to do Thy will, and Thy law is within my heart.' But a verse or two after, in the same psalm, he wailed, 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head. Therefore my heart faileth me.' One Man has transcribed the divine will on His will, without blurring a letter, or omitting a clause. One Man has been able to say, in the presence of the most fearful temptations, 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.' One Man has so completely written, perceived, and obeyed the law of His Father, that, looking back on all His life, He was conscious of no defect or divergence, either in motive or in act, and could affirm on the Cross, 'It is finished.' He who thus perfectly kept that divine law will give to us, if we ask Him, His spirit, to write it upon our hearts, and 'the law of the spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death.'

II. Now, secondly, note the impassable gulf which this fulfilled promise makes between Christianity and all other systems.

It is a new covenant, undoubtedly-an altogether new thing in the world. For whatever other laws have been promulgated among men have had this in common, that they have stood over against the Will with a whip in one hand, and a box of sweets in the other, and have tried to influence desires and inclinations, first by the setting forth of duty, then by threatening, and then by promises to obedience. There is the inherent weakness of all which is merely law. You do not make men good by telling them in what goodness consists, nor yet by setting forth the bitter consequences that may result from wrong-doing. All that is surface work. But there is a power which says that it deals with the will as from within, and moves, and moulds, and revolutionises it. 'You cannot make men sober by act of parliament,' people say. Well! I do not believe the conclusion which is generally drawn from that statement, but it is perfectly true in itself. To tell a man what he ought to do is very, very little help towards his doing it. I do not under-estimate the value of a clear perception of duty, but I say that, apart from Christianity, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, that clear perception

of duty is like a clear opening of a great gulf between a man and safety, which only makes him recoil in despair with the thought, 'how can I ever leap across that?' But the peculiarity of the gospel is that it gives both the knowledge of what we ought to be; and with and in the knowledge, the desire, and with and in the knowledge and the desire, the power to be what God would have us to be.

All other systems, whether the laws of a nation, or the principles of a scientific morality, or the solemn voice that speaks in our minds proclaiming some version of God's law to every man- all these are comparatively impotent. They are like bill-stickers going about a rebellious province posting the king's proclamation. Unless they have soldiers at their back, the proclamation is not worth the paper it is printed upon. But Christianity comes, and gives us that which it requires from us. So, in his epigrammatic way, St. Augustine penetrated to the very heart of this article when he prayed, 'Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt.'

III. Note the freedom and blessedness of this fulfilled promise.

Not to do wrong may be the mark of a slave's timid obedience. Not to

wish to do wrong is the charter of a son's free and blessed service. There is a higher possibility yet, reserved for heaven — not to be able to do wrong. Freedom does not consist in doing what I like — that turns out, in the long run, to be the most abject slavery, under the severest tyrants. But it consists in liking to do what I ought. When my wishes and God's will are absolutely coincident, then and only then, am I free. That is no prison, out of which we do not wish to go. Not to be confined against our wills, but voluntarily to elect to move only within the sacred, charmed, sweet circle of the discerned will of God, is the service and liberty of the sons of God.

Alas! there are a great many Christians, so-called, who know very little about such blessedness. To many of us religion is a burden. It consists of a number of prohibitions and restrictions and commandments equally unwelcome. 'Do not do this,' and all the while I would like to do it. 'Do that,' and all the while I do not want to do it. 'Pray, because it is your duty; go to chapel, because you think it is God's will; give money that you would much rather keep in your pockets: abstain from certain things that you hunger for; do other things that you do not at all desire to do, nor find any pleasure in doing.' That is the religion of hosts of people. They have need to ask themselves whether their religion is Christ's religion. Ah! brethren! — 'My yoke is easy and My burden light; not because the things that He bids and forbids are less or lighter than those which the world's morality requires of its followers, but because, so to speak, the yoke is padded with the velvet of love, and inclination coincides, in the measure of our true religion, with the discerned will of God.

IV. Lastly, one word about the condition of the fulfilment of this promise to us.

As I have been saying, it is sadly far ahead of the experience of crowds of so-called Christians. There are still great numbers of professing Christians, and I doubt not that I speak to some such, on whose hearts only a very few of the syllables of God's will are written, and these very faintly and blotted. But remember that the fundamental idea of this whole context is that of a covenant, and a covenant implies two parties, and duties and obligations on the part of each. If God is in covenant with you, you are in covenant with God. If He makes a promise, there is something for you to do in order that that promise may be fulfilled to you.

What is there to do? First, and last, and midst, keep close to Jesus Christ. In the measure in which we keep ourselves in continual touch with Him, will His law be written upon our hearts. If we are for ever twitching away the paper; if we are for ever flinging blots and mud upon it, how can we expect the transcript to be clear and legible? We must keep still that God may write. We must wait habitually in His presence. When the astronomer wishes to get the image of some far-off star, invisible to the eye of sense, he regulates the motion of his sensitive plate, so that for hours it shall continue right beneath the unseen Beam. So we have to still our hearts, and keep their plates — the fleshy tables of them — exposed to the heavens. Then the likeness of God will be stamped there.

Be faithful to what is written there, which is the Christian shape of the heathen commandment — 'Do the duty that lies nearest thee; so shall the next become plainer.' Be faithful to the line that is 'written,' and there will be more on the tablet to-morrow.

Now this is a promise for us all. However blotted and blurred and defaced by crooked, scrawling letters, like a child's copy-book, with its first pot-hooks and hangers, our hearts may be, there is no need for any of us to say despairingly, as we look on the smeared page, 'What I have written I have written.' He is able to blot it all out, to 'take away the hand-writing' — our own — 'that is against us, nailing it to His Cross,' and to give us, in our inmost spirits, a better knowledge of, and a glad obedience to, His discerned and holy will. So that each of us, if we choose, and will observe the conditions, may be able to say with all humility, 'Lo! I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, yea! Thy law is within my heart.'

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Hebrews 8:11 - III. 'All Shall Know Me'

‘They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.’— Hebrews 8:11

IN former sermons I have tried to bring out the force of the preceding two articles of ‘the New Covenant’ These two were the substitution of inward inclination and impulse for the rigid bonds of an external commandment, and the substitution of a real, spiritual, mutual possession of God and His people for the mere outward relationship that existed between Israel and Jehovah-My text is the third article of the New Covenant, It lays hold, like the other two, of something that characterised the ancient dispensation, declares its imperfection, recognises its prophetic aspect, and asserts that all which the former merely shadowed and foretold is accomplished in Jesus Christ.

In old days there had been some direct communication between God and a chosen few, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation, and they spake the things that they had heard of God to the multitude who had had no such communication. My text says that all this is swept away, and that the prerogative of every Christian man is direct access to, communication with, and instruction from, God Himself. The text has two things in it; the promise, which is the essence of it, and a consequence which is deduced from that promise, and sets forth its results in a graphic manner. ‘They all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest’; that is the real promise. ‘They shall no more teach every man his neighbour saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ is but a result thereof.

I. Now, I ask you to look with me at what this great promise means.

‘They shall know Me.’ Perhaps I can best explain what I take it to mean by commencing with an analogy or two which may help us to apprehend what is the significance of these words. We all know the difference between hearsay and sight. We may have read books of travel, and tell of some scene of great natural beauty or historic interest, and may think that we understand all about it, but it is always an epoch when our own eyes look for the first time at the snowy summit of an Alp, or for the first time at the Parthenon on its rocky height. We all know the difference between hearsay and experience. We read books of the poets that portray love and sorrow, and the other emotions that make up our throbbing, changeful life; but we need to go through the mill ourselves before we understand what the grip of the iron teeth of the harrow of affliction is, and we need to have had our own hearts dilated By a true and blessed affection, before we know the sweetness of love. Men may tell us about it, but we have to feel it ourselves before we know.

To come still closer to the force of my text, we all know the difference between hearing about a man and making his acquaintance. We may have been told much about him, and be familiar with his character, as we think, but, when we come face to face with him, and actually for ourselves experience the magnetism of his presence, or fall under the direct influence of his character, then we know that our former acquaintance with him, by means of hearsay, was but superficial and shadowy. ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see thee.’ Can you say that? If so, you understand my text — ‘They shall no more teach every man... his brother, saying, Know the Lord, and make acquaintance with Him’ as if He were a stranger — for ‘all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.’ There is all the difference between knowing about God and knowing God; just the difference .that there is between dogma and life, between theology and religion. We may have all articles of the Christian creed clear in our understandings, and may owe our possession of them to other people’s teaching; we may even, in a sense, believe them, and yet they may be absolutely outside of our lives, and it is only when they pass into the very substance of our being, and influence the springs of our conduct — it is only then that we know God.

Now, I maintain that this acquaintance with Him is what is meant in our text. It may not include any more intellectual propositions about Him than a man had before he knew Him, but it has turned doctrines into fact, and instead of the mere hearsay and traditional religion, which is the only religion of millions, it has brought the true heart-grasp of Him, which is the only thing worth calling a knowledge of God. For let me remind you that, whilst we may know a science or proposition by the exercise of our understandings in appropriate ways, that is not how we know people. And God is a person, and to know Him does not mean to understand about Him, but to be on speaking terms with Him, to have a familiar acquaintance with Him, to ‘summer and winter’ with Him, and so, by experience, to verify the things that before were mere doctrines. Now, at least the large majority of you call yourselves believers in Christianity. I want you to ask yourselves, and I would ask myself, whether my religion is knowing about God or knowing Him; whether it is all made up of a set of truths which I assent to, mainly because I am not sufficiently interested in them to contradict them, or whether these truths have become the very substance of my life. I do not believe in a religion without a dogma — I was going to say, I believe still less in a dogma without religion; and that is the Christianity of hosts of professing Christians. It is as useless as are the dried seeds that rattle in the withered head of a poppy in the autumn, or as the shrivelled kernel that sounds in the hollowness of a half-empty nut. Remember, dear brethren, that to know God is to become acquainted with Him, and that only on the path of such familiar, friendly, loving intercourse and communion with Him, can men find the confirmation

of the truths about Him which make up the eternal revelation of Him in the gospel. 'We know' — that is a valid certainty, arising from experience, and it has as good a right to call itself knowledge as have the processes by which men come to be sure about the physical facts of this material universe. Nay! I would even go further, and say that the fact that such a continual stream of witnesses, through all the generations, have been able to say, 'I have tasted and I have seen that God is good,' is to be taken into account by all impartial searchers after truth. And if men want to square their creeds with all the facts of humanity, let them not omit, in their consideration of the claims of Christian evidence, this fact, that from generation to generation men have said, and their lives have witnessed to its truths, 'We know in whom we have believed, and that He is able to keep us. We know that we are of God. Dear brethren! the whole case for Christianity cannot be appreciated from outside. 'Taste and see.' My text shows us the more true way. If we will accept that covenant we shall know the Lord in the depths of our hearts.

II. Notice how far this promise extends.

They all, from the least to the greatest, shall know; There is to be no distinction of rank or age, or endowment, which shall result in some of the people of God having a position from which any of the others are altogether shut out.

The writer is, of course, contrasting in his mind, though he does not express the contrast, the condition of things of old, when, as I said, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation received communications which they then imparted to their fellows. In the morning dawn the highest summits catch the rays first, but as the sun rises it floods the lower levels, and at mid-day shines right down into the depths of the cavities. So the world is now flooded with the light of Christ; and all Christian men and women, by virtue of their Christian character, do possess the unction from the Holy One, in which lie the potency and the promise of the knowledge of all things that are needful to be known for life and godliness. This is the true democracy of the gospel—the universal possession of the life of Christ through the Spirit.

Now, if that be so, then it is by no means a truth to be kept simply for the purpose of fighting against ecclesiastical or sacerdotal encroachments and denials of it, but it ought to be taken as the candle of the Lord, by each of us, and in the light of it we ought to search very rigidly, and very often, our own Christian character and experiences. You, dear brethren, with whom I am most closely associated here, you professing Christians of this congregation — do you know anything about that inward knowledge of God which comes from friendship with Him, and speaks irrefragable certainties in the heart which receives it? 'If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' If you owe all your knowledge of, and your faith in, the great verities of the gospel, and the loving personality of God, to the mere report of others, if you cannot verify these by your own experience, if you cannot say, 'Many things I know not; you can easily puzzle me with critical and philosophical subtleties, but this one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see' — if you cannot say that, I pray you, bethink yourselves whether your religion is not mainly a form, and how far it has any life in it at all.

But whilst thus the great promise of my text, in its very blessedness and fulness, does carry with it some solemn suggestions for searching self-examination, it also points in another direction. For consider what it excludes and what it permits, in the way of brotherly help and guidance. It certainly excludes on the one hand, all assumption of authority over the consciences and the understandings of Christian people, on the part either of churches or individuals, and, it makes short work of all claims that there continues a class of persons officially distinguished from their brethren, and having closer access to God than they. The true understanding of these words of my text, the recognition of the universality of the knowledge of God in all Christian people, has great revolutionary work yet to do amongst the churches of Christendom. For I do not know that there are any of them that have sufficiently recognised this principle. Not only in a church where there is a priesthood and an infallible head of the Church on earth, nor only in churches that are bound by human creeds imposed on them by men, but also in churches like ours, where there is no formal recognition of either of these two errors, the practical contradiction of this article of the New Covenant is apt to creep in. It is a great deal more the fault of the people than of the priest, a great deal more the fault of the congregation than of the pastor, when they are lazily contented to take all their religion at second-hand from him, and to shuffle all the responsibility off their own shoulders on to his. If my text obliges me, and all men who stand in my position, to say with the Apostle, 'Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy,' it obliges you, dear brethren, to take nothing from me, or any man, on our bare words, nor to exalt any of us into a position which would contradict the great principle of my text, but yourselves, at first hand, to go to God, and get straight from Him the teaching which He only can give. Dominion and subjection, authority and submission to men, in any part of the church are shut out by such words as these.

But brotherly help is not shut out. If a party of men are climbing a hill, and one is in advance of his fellows, when he reaches the summit he may look down and call to those below, and tell them how fair and wide the view is, and beckon them to come and give them a helping hand up. So, because Christian men vary in the extent to which they possess and utilise the one gift of knowledge of God, and some of them are in advance of the others, it is all in accordance with the principle of my text that they that are in advance should help their brethren, and give them a brotherly hand. Not as if my brother's word can give me the inward knowledge

of God, but it may help me to get that knowledge for myself. We — I speak now as a member of the preaching class — we can but do what the friend of the bridegroom does; he brings the bride to her lover, and then he shuts the door and leaves the two to themselves That is all that any of us can do. You must yourself draw the water from the well of salvation. We can only tell you, 'there is the well, and the water is sweet.'

III. Lastly, the means by which this promise is fulfilled.

I have already pointed out, in previous sermons, that the conception of the gospel as a new covenant was endorsed by Jesus Christ Himself in words which tell us how all these blessings that are set forth in this context are secured and brought to men, when in the institution of the Lord's Supper, He spoke of 'the New Covenant in His blood.' So I set first and foremost, above all other means, this one great truth, that all this inward knowledge of God, which is the prerogative of every Christian man, is made possible and actual for any of us, only by and through the mission, and especially the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. For therein does He set forth God to be known as nothing else but that supreme suffering and supreme self- surrender upon the Cross, ever can do or has done. We know God as He would have us know Him, only when we see Jesus suffering and dying for us; and then adoringly, as one in the presence of a mystery into which he can but look a little way, Bay that even there and then 'he that hath seen that Christ hath seen the Father.'

Jesus Christ's Mood, the seal of the Covenant, is the great means by which this promise is fulfilled, inasmuch u in that death He sweeps away all the hindrances which bar us out from the knowledge of God. The great dark wall of my sin rises between me and my Father. Christ's blood, like some magic drops upon a fortification, causes all the black barrier to melt away like a cloud; and the access to the throne of God is patent, even for sinful creatures like us. The veil is rent, and by that blood we have access into the holiest of all.

Christ is the source of this knowledge of God, inasmuch, further, as by His mission and death there is given to the whole world, if it will receive it, and to all who exercise faith in His name, the gift of that Divine Spirit who teaches to our inmost spirit the true knowledge of His Son.

And so, dear brethren, since it is in the incarnate and dying Christ that all knowledge of God is brought to men, that all possibility of friendship and communion between men and God is rooted, and that the Divine Spirit who leads us into the deep things of God is granted to each of us, there follows the plain conclusion that the one way by which every man and

woman on earth may find him and herself included within that 'all, from the least to the greatest,' is simply trust in Christ Jesus, in whom, in whose life, in whose death, God is made known, our alienation is swept away, and the Spirit of God, the Divine Teacher, is granted to us all.

Only, remember that my text stands in close connection with the preceding articles of this covenant, and that to delight in the law of the Lord is the sure way to know more of the Lord. One act of obedience from the heart will teach us more of God than all the sages can. It is more illuminating simply to do as He willed than to read and think and speculate and study.

'If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.'

And mutual possession of God by us, and of us by God, leads to fuller knowledge. To possess God is to love Him; and 'he that loveth knoweth God, yea! rather is known of God.'

So, dear brethren, do not be content with traditional religion, with a hearsay Christianity. 'Acquaint now thyself with Him,' and be at peace. Oh! there is nothing sweeter to a true preacher of Christ and His salvation than that those to whom he preaches should be able to do without him. It is my business to point you away from myself, however much I prize your love and confidence, as I ought to do; and to beseech you, for your own soul's sake, that you would by faith in Christ attain that knowledge of the only true God which He is sent to give. Then you will be able to say, 'Now, we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

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Hebrews 8:12 - IV. Forgiveness the Fundamental Blessing

'For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.' — Hebrews 8:12

WE have been considering, in successive sermons, the great promises preceding my text, which are the articles of the New Covenant. We reach the last of theme in this discourse. It is last in order of enumeration because it is first in order of fulfilment. The foundation is dug down to and discovered last, because the stones of it were laid first. The introductory 'for' in my text shows that

the fulfilment of all the preceding great promises depends upon and follows the fulfilment of this, the greatest of them. Forgiveness is the keystone of the arch. Strike it out, and the whole tumbles' into ruin. Forgiveness is the first gift to be received from the great cornucopiae of blessings which the gospel brings for men. The writer is tracing the stream upwards, and therefore he comes last to that which first gushes out from the divine heart. All these previous promises of delight in the law of the Lord, mutual possession between God and His people, knowledge of God which is based upon love, are consequences of this final article, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their iniquities will I remember no more.'

I. So, then, we remark, first, that forgiveness deals with man's deepest need.

It is fundamental, because it grapples with the true evil of humanity, which is not sorrow, but is sin. All men have 'come short of the glory of God,' and that fact, the fact of universal sinfulness, is the gravest fact of man's condition; for it affects his whole nature, and it disturbs and perverts all his relations to God. And so, if men would rightly diagnose the disease of humanity, they must recognise something far deeper than skin-deep symptoms, and discover that it is sin which is the source of all human misery and sorrow. To deal with humanity and to forget or ignore the true source of all the misery in the world — namely, the fact that we 'have all sinned and come short of the glory of God' — is absurd. 'Miserable comforters are ye all,' if pottering over the patient, you apply ointment to pimples when he is dying of cancer. I know, of course, that a great deal may be done, and that a great deal is to-day being done, to diminish the sum of human wretchedness; and I am not the man to say one word that shall seem to under-estimate or pour cold water upon any of these various schemes of improvement — philanthropic, social, economic, or political; but I do humbly venture to say that any of them, and all of them put together, if they do not grapple with this fact of man's sin, are dealing with the surface and leaving the centre untouched. Sin does not come only from ignorance, and therefore it cannot be swept away by knowledge. It does not come only from environment, and therefore it cannot be taken out of human history by improvement of circumstances. It does not come from poverty, and therefore economical changes will not annihilate it. The root of it lies far deeper than any of these things. The power which is to make humanity blessed must dig down to the root and grasp that, and tear it up, and eject it from the heart of man before society can be thoroughly healed. Now, what does Christianity do with this central part of human experience? My text tells us partly, and only partly, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' Of course, the divine oblivion is a strong metaphor for the treatment of man's sins as non-existent. It is the same figure, in a somewhat different application, as is found in the great promise, 'I will cast their sins behind My back into the depths of the sea.' It is the same metaphor as is suggested in a somewhat different application, by the other saying, 'Blessed is the man whoso sin is covered.' And the fact that underlies the metaphors of forgetfulness or burying in the ocean depths, or covering over so as to-be invisible, is just this, that God's love flows out to the sinful man, unhindered by the fact of his transgression.

If Christian people, and doubters about Christian truth, would understand the depth and loftiness of the Christian idea of forgiveness, there would be less difficulty felt about it. For pardon is not the same thing as the removal of the consequences of wrongdoing. It is so in regard of the mere outward judicial: procedure of nations, but it is not so in the family. A father often pardons, and says that he does so before he punishes, and it is the same with God. The true notion and essence of forgiveness, as the Bible conceives it, is not the putting aside of consequences, but the flow of the Father's heart to the erring child.

Sin is a great black dam, built up across the stream, but the flood of love from God's heart rises over it, and pours across it, and buries it beneath the victorious, full waters of the 'river of God.' Here is a world wrapped in mist, and high above the mist the unbroken sunshine of the divine love pours down upon the upper layer, and thins and thins and thins it until it disappears, and the full sunshine floods the rejoicing world, and the ragged fragments of the mist melt into the blue. 'I have blotted out as a cloud thy sins and as a thick cloud thy transgressions,' The outward consequences of forgiven sin may have to be reaped. If a man has lived a sensuous life, no. repentance, no forgiveness, will prevent the drunkard's hand from trembling, or cure the corrugations of his liver. If a man has sinned, no divine forgiveness will ever take the memory of his transgressions, nor their effects, out of his character. But the divine forgiveness may so modify the effects as that, instead of past sin being a source of torment or a tyrant which compels to future similar transgressions, pardoned sin will become a source of lowly self-distrust, and may even tend to increase in goodness and righteousness. When bees cannot remove some corruption out of the hive they cover it over with wax, and then it is harmless, and they can build upon it honey-bearing cells. Thus it is possible that, by pardon, the consequences which must be reaped may be turned into occasions for good.

But the act of the divine forgiveness does annihilate the deepest and the most serious consequences of my sin; for hell is separation from God, the sense of discord and alienation between Him and me; and all these are swept away.

So here is the foundation blessing, which meets man's deepest need. And be sure of this, that any system which cannot grapple with that need will never avail for the necessities of a sinful world. Unless our new evangelists can come to us with as clear an utterance as this of my text, they will work their enchantments in vain; and the world will be the old, sad, miserable world, after all that they can do.

II. This forgiveness is attained through Christ, and through Him only.

I have tried to show in former sermons, that the whole of these promises of what our writer calls 'the New Covenant,' are, as our Lord Himself said, sealed 'in His blood.' And that is especially true in reference to this promise of forgiveness. It is in Christ Jesus, and in Christ Jesus alone, that that pardon which my text speaks of is secured to men.

I need not dwell upon the Scriptural statements to this effect, but I desire to emphasize this thought, that the Christian teaching of forgiveness is based upon the conception of Christ's work and especially of Christ's death, as being the atonement for the world's sin. It is because, and only because, 'He bore our sins in His own body on the tree,' that the full-toned gospel proclamation can be rung out to men, that God 'remembers their transgressions no more.' Unless that foundation be firmly laid in the New Testament conception of the meaning and power of the death of Christ, I know not where there is a basis for the proclamation to man of divine forgiveness.

Of course, my text itself does show that the very common misrepresentation of the New Testament evangelical teaching about this matter is a misrepresentation. It is often objected to that teaching that it alleges that Christ's sacrifice effected a change in the divine heart and disposition, and made God love men whom He did not love before. The mighty 'I will' of my text makes no specific reference to Christ's death, and rather implies what is the true relation between the love of God and the death of Jesus Christ, that God's love was the originating cause, of which Christ's death was the redeeming effect. 'He so loved the world that He gave His... Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should... have eternal life.' And no wise evangelical teacher ever has asserted, or does assert, anything else than that the mission of Jesus Christ is the consequence, and not the cause, of the Father's love to sinful men.

But that being kept distinctly in view, I suppose I need not remind you how, like the strand that runs through the cables of the Royal Navy, the red thread of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world runs through the whole of the New Testament. It is fashionable nowadays to say that no theory of the atonement is needed in order that men should receive the benefit Christ's work. That is partially true, in so far as that no human conceptions will exhaust the fulness of that great work, nor can penetrate to all its depths. But it is not true, as I humbly take it, inasmuch as if a man is to get the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ, he must have this theory, that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' And that is the teaching of the whole New Testament.

I need not remind you how all Paul's writing is saturated with it, but I may remind you that to people who were very lynx-eyed critics of him and of his teaching, he said, about that very statement that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures — 'whether it were they or I, so we preach.' And his appeal to the consensus and unanimity of the apostles is amply vindicated by the documents that still remain. We are told that there are types of teaching in the New Testament. There are, and very beautifully they vary, and very harmoniously they blend. But there are no diversities in regard to this matter. If Paul says, 'In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins,' Peter says, 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree'; and John says, 'He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world.' And if, as I believe, the Book of the Revelation is his, the vision that John saw in the heavens was the vision of 'a Lamb as it had been slain'; and the song which he heard rising from immortal lips was of praise unto Him that 'hath loosed us from our sins by His own blood.'

'So they preached.' God grant that it may be true of all of us; 'so we Believe.' For; Brethren, this clear, certain statement of the gospel of forgiveness through Jesus Christ is the characteristic glory of the whole revelation. Without it, apart from Him and His Cross, I do not know how the hope of forgiveness can be more than dim and doubtful I know not how any man that has once felt the grip of evil on his inclinations, and the responsibility and guilt which he has drawn down upon his head by his transgressions, can find a firm footing for his assurance of pardon, apart from the Cross of Jesus Christ. Without that, the divine forgiveness is but a peradventure, sometimes a hope, sometimes an illusion. The men that

reject Christianity for the most part proclaim the gospel of despair.

'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' in such a sense as to annihilate the possibility of pardon. But in Christ we understand that we may reap these fruits, and yet be pardoned. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and tookest vengeance of their inventions.' Forgiveness apart from Christ stands, as it seems to me, in no intelligible relation to the divine character. And, apart from Christ, forgiveness is apt to dwindle down, and to be degraded into mere lazy tolerance of evil, and to make God a good-natured, indifferent Sovereign, who does not so very much mind whether His subjects do His will or not.

But when we can say, 'He died for my sins,' then we can see that the divine righteousness and the divine love are but two names for one thing, and forgiveness lifts us into a region of higher purity. Christianity alone teaches the loftiest ideal of human righteousness, the loftiest conception of the divine character, the absolute inflexibility of the divine law and withal full, free pardon. It stands alone in the sombre aspect under which it contemplates humanity, and the boundless hope of its possibilities which it entertains. It stands alone in that forgiveness is the means to higher holiness; and in that, pardoning, it heals, and whispers 'Go thy way; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.' Therefore is it a gospel; therefore is it the New Covenant in His blood.

III. Lastly, this forgiveness is fundamental to all other Christian blessings.

As I have said, the very structure of our text shows that that was the writer's idea. There can be no 'delight in the law of the Lord,' which is the first of the articles of the New Covenant, until there is the taking away of the sin which deepens aversion to God's law, and until the Lawgiver has become beloved for the sake of His received forgiveness. Then we shall delight in the law when we love the lips that proclaim it, because before they issued commandments they decreed absolution, and declared 'Neither do I condemn thee.'

Forgiveness precedes the second of these covenant blessings — viz., mutual possession between God and His people. For so long as there remains unforgiven sin in a man's heart, it comes like a film of atmospheric air or grains of dust between two polished metal plates, forbidding their adhesion; and only when it is taken away will they come together and abide united. It lies at the foundation of, and must precede, all that true knowledge of God, which is the third of the articles of the covenant, and is a consequence of love and communion. 'For how can two walk together except they be agreed?' Until my sin is taken from me the eyes of my soul are dim; and I know not God in deep reciprocal possession and continual love. And so with all other of the blessings and the hopes which Christian men are entitled to cherish by reason of this covenant of God's changeless love.

I need not dwell upon them, but I would leave with you these thoughts. A Christianity which does not begin with the proclamation of forgiveness is impotent. Again, a Christianity which does not base forgiveness on Christ's sacrifice is also impotent. The history of the Church shows that preachers and teachers and churches that do not know what to say when a poor soul comes to them and asks, 'What must I do to be saved?' are of no use, or next to none. The man in whom there are devils says to such maimed representations of the gospel, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' and leaps upon them, and overcomes them. The whole experience of the past demonstrates that. And so one laments the vagueness and the faltering in proclaiming this truth so common in this day. Brethren, I, for my part, believe that the only type of Christianity which will win men's hearts is that modeled on the pattern of the New Testament teaching, which begins with the fact of sin, and, having dealt with that, then goes on to bestow all other blessings.

But do not forget another thing, that a Christianity which does not build holiness, delight in God's law, conscious possession of Him and possession by Him, and deep, blessed knowledge of Him, on forgiveness, is woefully imperfect. And that is the Christianity of a great many of us. Here is the first round of the ladder: 'I will remember their iniquities no more.' Put your foot upon that and then begin to ascend; and do not stop till you have reached the top, whence His face looks down, and whence you can step on to the stable standing-ground beside His very throne. Begin with forgiveness, and all these blessings: shall be added unto you, if you keep the covenant of your God.

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Hebrews 8:18 - II. Their God, My People

'I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.' — Hebrews 8:18

Two mirrors set over against each other reflect one another and themselves in each other, in long perspective. Two hearts that love, with similar reciprocation of influence, mirror back to each other their own affections.

'I am thine; thou art mine,' is the very mother-tongue of love, and the source of blessedness. All loving hearts know that. That mutual surrender, and, in surrender, reciprocal possession, is lifted up here into the highest regions. 'I will be their God, they shall be My people.' That was the fundamental promise of the Mosaic dispensation, laid at Sinai — 'Ye shall be unto Me a people for a possession.' All through the Old Testament we find it re-echoed; and yet the interpenetration of God and the people was imperfect and external in that ancient covenant.

So the writer here, falling back upon the marvellous prophecy of Jeremiah, regards this as being one of the characteristics of Christianity, that what was shadowed in Israel's possession of God and God's possession of Israel, is, in substance, blessedly and permanently realised in the relations of God to Christian souls, and of Christian souls to God.

Not only is there this mutual possession, as expressed by the two halves of my text, but each half, when cleft and analysed, reveals the necessity for a similar reciprocity. For God's giving of Himself to us is nothing to us without our taking of God for ours; and, in like manner, our giving of ourselves to God, would be all incomplete, unless in His strange love, He stooped from amidst the praises of Israel to accept the poor gifts that we bring.

So the duality of my text breaks up into a double dualism, and we have God giving Himself to us, and His gift realised in our acceptance of Him for ours; and then we have our giving of ourselves to God, and the gift realised and ratified in His acceptance of

us for His. And to these four points, briefly, I wish to turn.

I. 'I will be to them a God.' That is God's gift of Himself to us.

The words go far deeper than the necessary divine relation to all His creatures. He is a God to every star that burns, and to every worm that creeps, and to every gnat that dances for a moment. But there is a closer relation, and more blessed than that. He is a God to every man that lives, lavishing upon him manifestations of His divinity, and sustaining him in life. But besides these great and wondrous universal relations which spring from the very fact of creative power and creatural independence, there is a tenderer, a truer relationship of heart to heart, of spirit to spirit, which is set forth here as the prerogative of the men who trust in Jesus Christ. The special does not contradict or deny the universal, the universal does not exclude the special — 'I will be a God to them,' in a deeper, more blessed, soul-satisfying, and vital sense than to others around them.

And what lies in that great promise passes the wit of man and the tongues of angels fully to conceive and tell. All that lies in that majestic monosyllable, which is shorthand for life, and light, and all perfectness, lived in a living person who has a heart, that word God — all that is included in that name, God will be to you and me, if we like to have Him for such. 'I will be a God to them' — then round about them shall be cast the bulwark of the everlasting arm and the everlasting purpose. 'I will be a God to them' — then in all dark places there will be a light, and in all perplexities there will be a path, and in all anxieties there will be quietness, and in all troubles there will be a hidden light of joy, and in every circumstance life will be saturated with an almighty presence, which shall make the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. 'I will be a God to them' — then their desires, their hungerings after blessedness, their seekings after good, need no longer roam open-mouthed and empty, throughout a waste world where there is only scanty fodder enough to keep them from expiring but never food enough to satisfy them; but in Him longings and hopes will all find their appropriate satisfaction. And there will be rest in God, and whatsoever aspirations after loftier goodness may have to be cherished, and whatsoever base hankerings still lingering have to be fought, the strength of a present God will enable us to aspire, and not to be disappointed, and to cast ourselves into the conflict, and be ever victorious. 'I will be to them a God,' is the same as to say that everything which my complex nature can require I shall find in Him.

It says, too, that all that Godhood, in all the incomprehensible sweep of its attributes, is on my side, if I will. They tell us that there are rays in the spectrum which no eye can see, but which yet have mightier chemical and other influences than those that are visible. The spectrum of God is not all visible, but beyond the limits of comprehension there lie dark energies which are full of blessedness and of power for us. 'I will be to them a God.' We can understand something of what that name signifies; and all that is enlisted for us. There is much which that name signifies that we do not understand, and all that, too, is working on our side.

Now, remember, that this giving of God to us by Himself is all concentrated in one historical act. He gave Himself to us, when He spared not His only begotten Son. My text is one of the articles of the New Covenant. And what sealed and confirmed all the articles of that Covenant? The blood of Jesus Christ, It was when 'God spared not His own Son,' and when the Son spared not Himself, on that Cross of Calvary, that there came to pass the ratifying and filling out and perfecting of the ancient, typical promise, 'I will be to them a God.' There was the unspeakable gift in which God was given to humanity.

II. And now we have to take the giving God and make Him our God.

I need not do more than just glance for a moment at that thought, for it is familiar enough to us all. Here is a treasure of gold lying in the road. Anybody that picks it up may have it; the man who does not pick it up does not get it, though it is there for him to lay his fingers on. Here is a river flowing past your door. You may put a pipe into it, and bring all its wealth and refreshment into your house, and use it for the quenching of your thirst, for the cleansing of your person, for the cooking of your victuals, for the watering of your gardens. And here is all the fulness of God welling past us, but Niagara may thunder close by a man's door, and he may perish of thirst. 'I will be to them a God.' What does that matter if I do not turn round and say: 'O Lord! Thou art my God'? Nothing! Beggars come to your door, and you give them a bit of bread, and they go away, and you find it flung into the mud round the corner. God gives us Himself. I wonder how many of us have tossed the gift over the first hedge, and left it there. Yet all the while we are dying for want of it, and do not know that we are.

Brethren! you have to enclose a bit of the prairie for your very own, and put a hedge round it, and cultivate it, and you will get abundant fruits. You have to translate 'their' into the singular possessive pronoun, and say 'mine,' and put out the hand of faith, and make Him in very deed yours. Then, and only then, is this giving perfected.

III. In the third place, we have to give ourselves to God.

We begin — as our text, profoundly, with all its simplicity, begins — with an act of God to us. He enters into loving relations with me,

and it is only when I am melted and encouraged by the perception and reception of these relations that there comes the answering throb in my heart. The mirror in our spirit has the other one reflected upon it; then it flings back its own reflection to the parent glass. God comes first with the love that He pours over us poor creatures, and when 'we have known and believed the love that God hath to us,' then, and only then, do we throb back the reflected, ay, the kindred love. For love is the same thing in the divine heart and in my heart. In the other bonds that unite men to God, what is man's corresponds to what is God's. My faith corresponds to His faithfulness.

My dependence corresponds to His sufficiency. My weak clinging answers to His strong grasp; my obedience to His commanding. But my love not only corresponds to, as the concave does to the convex, but it assimilates to; and is the likeliest thing in the creature to, the love of the Creator. And so there is a parallel, wonderful and blessed, between the giving love which says 'I will be to them a God,' and the recipient love which responds, 'We are to Thee a people.'

Remember, too, that not only is there this general resemblance, but that our love manifests itself to God — I was going to say, just as God's love manifests itself to us, though, of course, there are differences that I do not need to touch upon here, in the act of self-surrender. He gave Himself to us, Ay! and we may use another form of speech still more emphatic, and say, He gave up Himself. For, surely, difficult as it may be for us to keep our footing in those lofty heights where the atmosphere is so rare, the gift of Jesus Christ was surrender; when the Father spared not His own Son,

but delivered Him up for us all.

And, brethren, what is the surrender of the man who, receives the love of God? In what region of my nature is that giving up of myself most imperative and blessed? In my will. The will is the man, The centre-point of every human being is. the will, and it is no use for us to talk about our having given ourselves to God, in response and in thankfulness to His gift of Himself to us, unless we come and say 'Lord! not my will, but Thine'; and bow ourselves in un-reluctant and constant submission to His commandments, and to all His will. Brethren, we give ourselves to God when, moved by His giving of Himself to us, we yield up our love to Him, and love never rests until it has yielded up its will to the beloved. He, indeed, gives, asking for nothing; but He gives in a still deeper sense, asking for everything; and that everything is myself. And I yield myself to Him in the measure in which I set my thankful love upon Him, and then bow myself as His servant, in humble consecration to Himself, with all my heart and soul and mind and strength.

IV. Lastly, God takes us for His.

'They shall be My people.' That is wonderful. It is strange that we can imitate God, in a certain fashion, in the gift of self; but it is yet more strange and blessed that God accepts that gift, and counts it as one of His treasures to possess us. One of the psalmists had a deep insight into the miracle of the divine condescension when he said 'He was extolled with my tongue.' Strange that the loftiest of creatures should be lifted higher by the poor tremulous lever of my praises! and yet He is so. He takes as His, such poor creatures, full of imperfection, and tremulous faith, and disproved love, as you and I know ourselves to be, and He says 'My people.' 'They shall be Mine,' My jewels, says He, 'in the day which I make.' Oh, brethren! it sometimes seems to me that it is more wonderful that God should take me for His, than that He should give me Himself for mine. Have you given yourself to Him? Have you begun where He begins, taking first the gift that is freely given to you of God, even Jesus Christ, in whom God dwells, and who makes all the Godhead yours, for your very own? Have you taken God for yours, by faith in that Lord' who loved me, and gave Himself for me?' And then smitten by His love and having the chains of self melted by the fire of His great mercy, have you said, 'Lo! truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds'? Dear brethren, you never own yourselves till you give yourselves away; and you never will give yourselves to God, to be His, unless with all your heart and strength you cling to the rock-truth, that God has given Himself to every man who will take Him, in Jesus Christ, to be that man's God for ever and ever.

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Hebrews 9:11-14, 24-28 - The Priest in the Holy Place

'But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say. not of this building; 12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us 13. For if the blood of hulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 25. Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others: 26. (For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world) but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of

Himself. 27. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: 28. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.’ — Hebrews 9:11-14, 24-28.

SPACE forbids attempting full treatment of these pregnant verses. We can only sum up generally their teaching on the priesthood of Jesus.

I. Christ, as the high priest of the world, offers Himself. Obviously verse 14 refers to Christ’s sacrificial death, and in verse 26 His ‘sacrifice of Himself’ is equivalent to His ‘having suffered.’

The contention that the priestly office of Jesus begins with His entrance into the presence of God is set aside by the plain teaching of this passage, which regards His death as the beginning of His priestly work. What, then, are the characteristics of that offering, according to this Writer? The point dwelt on most emphatically is that He is both priest and sacrifice. That great thought opens a wide field of meditation, for adoring thankfulness and love. It implies the voluntariness of His death. No necessity bound Him to the Cross. Not the nails, but His, love; fastened Him there. Himself He would not save, because others He would save. The offering was ‘through the Eternal Spirit,’ the divine personality in Himself, which as it were, took the knife and slew the human life. That sacrifice was ‘without blemish,’ fulfilling in perfect moral purity the prescriptions of the ceremonial law, which but clothe in outward form the universal consciousness that nothing stained or faulty is worthy to be given to God. What are the blessings brought to us by that wondrous self-sacrifice? They are stated most generally in verse 26 as the putting away of sin, and again in verse 28 as being the bearing of the sins of many, and again in verse 14 as cleansing conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Now the first of these expressions includes the other two, and expresses the blessed truth that, by His death, Jesus has made an end of sin, in all its shapes and powers, whether it is regarded as guilt or burden, or taint and tendency paralysing and disabling. Sin is guilt, and Christ’s death deals with our past, taking away the burden of condemnation. Thus verse 28 presents Him as bearing the sins of many, as the scapegoat bore the sins of the congregation into a land not inhabited, as ‘the Lord made to meet’ on the head of the Servant ‘the iniquities of us all.’ The best commentary on the words here is, ‘He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.’ But sin has an effect in the future as in the past, and the death of Christ deals with that, So verse 14 parallels it not only with the sacrifice which made access to God possible, but with the ceremonial of the red heifer,’ by which pollution from touching a corpse was removed. A conscience which has been in contact with ‘dead works’ (and all works which are not done from ‘the life’ are so) is unfit to serve God, as well as lacking in wish to serve; and the only way to set it free from the nightmare which fetters it is to touch it with ‘the blood,’ and then it will spring up to a waking life of glad service. ‘The blood’ is shed to take away guilt; ‘the blood’ is the life, and, being shed in the death, it can be transfused into our veins, and so will. cleanse us from all sin. Thus, in regard both to past and future, sin is put away by the sacrifice of Himself. The completeness of His priestly work is further attested by the fact, triumphantly dwelt on in the lesson, that it is done once for all, and needs no repetition, and is incapable of repetition, while the world lasts.

II. Christ, as the high priest of the world, passes into heaven for us.

The priest’s office of old culminated in his entrance into the Holy of Holies, to present the blood of sacrifice. Christ’s priesthood is completed by His ascension and heavenly intercession. We necessarily attach local ideas to this, but the reality is deeper than all notions of place. The passage speaks of Jesus as ‘entering into the holy place,’ and again as entering ‘heaven itself for us.’ It also speaks of His having entered ‘through the greater and more perfect tabernacle,’ the meaning of which phrase depends on the force attached to ‘through.’ If it is taken locally, the meaning is as in chapter 4:14, that He has passed through the [lower] heavens to ‘heaven itself’; if it is taken instrumentally (as in following clause), the meaning is that Jesus used the ‘greater tabernacle’ in the discharge of His office of priest. The great truth underlying both the ascension and the representations of this context is, as verse 24 puts it, that He appears ‘before the face of God,’ and there carries on His work, preparing a place for us. Further. we note that Jesus, as priest representing humanity, and being Himself man, can stand before the face of God, by virtue of His sacrifice, in which man is reconciled to God. His sinless manhood needed no such sacrifice, but, as our representative, He could not appear there without the blood of sacrifice. That blood, as shed on earth, avails to ‘put away sin’; as presented in heaven, it avails ‘for us,’ being ever present before the divine eye, and influencing the divine dealings. That entrance is the climax of the process by which He obtained ‘eternal redemption’ for us. Initial redemption is obtained through His death, but the full, perfect unending deliverance from all sin and evil is obtained, indeed, by His passing into the Holy Place above, but possessed in fact only when we follow Him thither. We need Him who ‘became dead’ for pardon and cleansing; we need Him who is ‘alive for evermore’ for present participation in His life and present sitting with Him in the heavenly places, and for the ultimate and eternal entrance there, whence we shall go no more out.

III. Christ, as the high priest of the world, will come forth from the holy place.

The ascension cannot end His connection with the world. It carries in itself the prophecy of a return. ‘If I go,... I will come again.’ The high priest came forth to the people waiting for him, so our High Priest will come. Men have to die, and ‘after death,’ not merely

as following in time, but as necessarily following in idea and fact, a judgment in which each man's work shall be infallibly estimated and manifested. Jesus has died 'to bear the sins of many.' There must follow for Him, too, an estimate and manifestation of His work. What for others is a judgment, for Him is manifestation of His sinlessness and saving power. He shall be seen, no longer stooping under the weight of a world's sins, but 'apart from sin,' He shall be seen 'unto salvation,' for the vision will bring with it assimilation to His sinless likeness. He shall be thus seen by those that wait for Him, looking through the shows of time to the far-off shining of His coming, and meanwhile having their loins girt and their lamps burning.

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Hebrews 10:12 The Enthroned Christ

'This man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.' — Hebrews 10:12

To that tremendous assertion the whole New Testament is committed. Peter, Paul, John, the writer of this book — all teach that the Jesus who died on Calvary now sits at the right hand of God. This is no case of distance casting a halo round the person of a simple teacher, for six weeks after Calvary, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared that Jesus, 'exalted at the right hand of God,' had 'shed forth this,' the gift of that Divine Spirit. This is no case of enthusiastic disciples going beyond their Master's teaching, for all the evangelists who record our Lord's trial before the Sanhedrin concur in saying that the turning-point of it, which led to His condemnation, was the declaration, 'Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power.' The rulers interpreted the assertion to mean an assertion of divinity, and therefore condemned Him to death. Christ was silent, and the silence witnessed that they interpreted His meaning aright. So, then, for good or evil, we have Jesus making the tremendous assertion, which His followers but repeated. Let us try to look at these words, and draw from them some of the rich fulness of their meaning. Communion, calm repose, participation in divine power and dominion, and much besides, are implied in this great symbol. And I desire to dwell upon the various aspects of it for a-few moments now.

I. Here we have the attestation of the completeness, the sufficiency, and the perpetuity of Christ's sacrifice.

Look at the context. Mark the strong words which immediately precede the last clause of my text. 'This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.' The writer has just been arguing that all Jewish sacrifice, which he regarded as being of divine-appointment, was inadequate, and derived its whole importance from being a prophetic shadow of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And he points, first, in proof of his thesis, to the entire disparity of the two things — the taking away of sin, and the blood of bulls and of goats. And then he adds a subsidiary consideration, saying in effect, The very fact that day after day the sacrifices are continued, shows that they had no power to do the thing for which they were offered — viz. 'to quiet consciences.' For, if the consciences were quieted, then the sacrifice would cease to be offered. And so he draws a sharp contrast between the priests who stand daily ministering and 'offering oftentimes the same sacrifice,' which by their very repetition are demon-strated to be inadequate to effect their purpose, and Jesus. Instead of these priests standing, offering, and doing over and over again their impotent sacrifices, 'this Man' offered His once. That was enough, and for ever. And the token that the one sacrifice was adequate, really could take away sin, would never, through all the rolling ages of the world's history, lose its efficacy, lies here— He sits at the right hand of God. Brethren, in that session, which the Lord Himself commanded us to believe, is the divine answer and endorsement of the triumphant cry upon the Cross, 'It is finished,' and it is God's last, loudest, and ever- reverberating proclamation to all the world, in all its generations, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

Do you think of Christ's mission and Christ's work as this writer thought of it, finding the vital centre in its sacrificial efficacy, seeing it as being mainly a work caused by, in relation to, and victorious over, man's sin and my sin, and as attested as sufficient for all sin, for the sins of the world, in all generations, by the fact that, having offered it once, the High Priest, as this same writer says in another place, sat at the right hand of God? These two things, the high Scriptural notion of the essential characteristic and efficacy of Christ's work as being sacrificial, and the high Scriptural notion of His present session at the right hand of God; these two things are correlated and bound inseparably together. If you only think of Jesus Christ as being a great teacher, a blessed example, the very flower and crown of immaculate humanity, if you listen to His words, and rejoice over the beauty of His character, but do not see that the thing which He, and He alone, does, is to deal with the tremendous reality of human transgression, and to annihilate it, both in regard of its guilt and of its power, then the notion of His session at the right hand of God becomes surplusage and superstition. But if we see, as I pray God that we may each see for ourselves, that when He came, He 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,' and that even that does not exhaust the significance of His Person, and the purpose of His mission, but that He came 'to give His life a ransom for many,' then, oh! then, when my conscience asks in agony, 'Is there a way of getting rid of my transgressions?' and when my weak will asks, in tremulous indecision, 'Is there a way by which I can shake off the tyranny of this usurping evil power that has fixed its claws in my character and my habits?' then I turn and look to the Christ enthroned at the right hand of power, and I say, 'This Man has offered one sacrifice for sins for ever'; and there, in that calm session at God's right hand, is the attestation that His sacrifice is complete, is sufficient, and is perpetual.

II. We have here the revelation of our Lord's calm repose.

That is expressed, of course, by the very attitude in which, in the symbol, He is represented. Away down in the Egyptian desert there sit, moulded in colossal calm, two giant figures, with hands laid restfully in their laps, and wide-open eyes gazing out over the world. There they have sat for millenniums, the embodiment of majestic repose. So Christ 'sitteth at the right hand of God' rapt in the fulness of eternal calm. But that tranquillity is parallel with the Scriptural representation of the rest of God after creation, which neither indicates previous exhaustion nor connotes present idleness, but expresses the completion of the work and the correspondence of the reality with the ideal which was in the Maker's mind.

In like manner, as I have been trying to point out to you, Christ's rest means the completeness of His finished work, and carries along with it, as that divine rest after creation does in its region, the conception of continuous activity, for just as little as the continuous phenomena of nature can be conceived of apart from the immanent activity of the ever-working God, and just as the last word of all physical science is that, beneath the so-called causes and so-called forces there must lie a personal will, the only cause known to man, and preservation is a continuous creation, and the changes in nature are the result of the will of the active God, so the past work of Christ, of which He said, when He died, 'It is finished!' is prolonged into, and carried on through, the ages by the continuous activity of the ever-working Christ.

'He sitteth at the right hand of God'; and to that session may be applied in full truth what He said Himself, in the vindication of His work on the Sabbath day — 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'

So the dying martyr looked up in the council chamber, and beyond the vaulted roof saw the heavens opened, and with a significant variation in the symbolical attitude, saw 'the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' The seated Christ, we might say, had sprung to His feet, in answer to the dying martyr's faith and prayer, and granted him the vision, not of calm repose, but of intensest activity for his help and sustaining.

The appendix to Mark's Gospel, in like manner, unites these two conceptions of undisturbed tranquillity and of energetic work. For he says that the Lord 'was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God, and they went... everywhere preaching the word.' Then did the Commander-in-chief send His soldiers out into the battlefield, and Himself retire to the safe shelter of the hill? By no means. For the two halves of the picture which look so unlike one another — the Lord seated there, and the servants wandering about and toiling here — are brought together into the one solid reality, 'they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord' — seated up yonder — 'working with them.' So constant activity is the very essence and inseparable accompaniment of the undisturbed tranquillity of the seated Christ. In other places in Scripture we get the same blending together of the two ideas, as, for instance, when Paul says 'It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And in like manner, in Peter's utterance Upon Pentecost, already referred to, you find the same idea.

'Being at the right hand of God exalted, He hath showed forth this which ye now see and hear.' So, working with us, working in us, working for us, working through us, the ever active Christ is with His people, and seated at the right hand of God, shares in all their labours, in all their difficulties, in all their warfare.

III. Lastly, we have here the revelation of Christ's participation in divine power and dominion.

There is a very remarkable and instructive variety in the forms of expression conveying this idea in various parts of the New Testament. We read from His own lips, 'seated at the right hand of power.' We read usually 'at the right hand of God.' We read in this Epistle 'at the right hand of the Majesty of the Highest,' and also 'at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.' So you see our Lord Himself dwelt mainly on the conception of participation in power. And these other passages which I have quoted deal mainly with the conception of the participation in royal authority and dominion. And these two go together.

Then there is another observation to be made, and that is that this sitting at God's right hand is to be interpreted as purely symbolical. For you cannot localize 'the right hand of God.' That 'right hand' is everywhere, wherever the divine power is working. So that, though I, for my part, believe that the human corporeity of Jesus Christ, with which He ascended into the heavens, does abide in a locality, it is not that localization which is meant by this great symbol of my text, but it is the declaration of a state, rather than of a place — participation in the power that belongs to God, and not a session in a given locality.

There is another remark also to be made, and that is that, according to the full-toned belief of the Christian Church when Jesus Christ in His ascension returned to the Father, from whom He had come, He carried with Him this great difference between His then — that is to say, His present — state, and the pre-incarnate state, viz., that now He has carried into unity with the Father the glorified manhood which He assumed on earth, and there is no difference between the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and the glory in which He now sits. Humanity is thus gathered into divinity.

Now, brethren, I am not going to dwell upon these thoughts, for they go far beyond the powers of my speech; but I am bound by my own conceptions of what Christ Himself has taught us, to reiterate that here we have the plainest teaching, founded on His own

express statement, that He is participant of divine fellowship, so close as that it is represented either by being in the bosom of the Father, or by sitting at the right hand of God, and that 'all power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth,' so as that He is the Administrator of the universe. The hands that were pierced with the nails, and into one of which was thrust, in mockery, the reed for a sceptre, now carry the sceptre of the universe, and He is 'King of kings and Lord of lords.' 'He sitteth at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty in the heavens.'

Now all this should have a very strong practical effect upon us. 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.' Oh, brethren! if we carried with us day by day into all our difficulties and struggles, and amidst the glittering fascinations and temptations of this earthly life that great thought, and if we kept the heavens open — for we can do so — and keep before our eyes that vision, how small the difficulties, what molehills the mountains, and how void of charm the seducing temptations would then be! Christ seen — like the popular idea of the sunshine streaming down upon a coal fire — puts out the fuliginous flame of earth's temptations, and dims the kindled brightness of earth's light. And if we really, and not as a mere dogma, had incorporated this faith into our lives, how different that last moment, and what lies beyond it, would look. I do not know how it may be with others, but to me the conception of eternity is chill and awful and repellent; it seems no blessing to live for ever. But if we people the waste future with the one figure of the living Christ exalted for us, it all becomes different, and, like the sunrise on snowy summits, the chill heights, not to be trodden by human foot, flash up into rosy beauty that draws men's desires. 'I go to prepare a place for you'; and He prepares it by being there Himself, for then, then it becomes Home. 'And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am there ye may be also' — 'sitting on My throne, as I overcame, and am sat down with My Father on His throne.'

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Hebrews 10:14 Perfected and Being Sanctified

'By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' — Hebrews 10:14

IN the preceding sentence there is another 'for ever,' which refers to the sacrifice of Christ, and declares its perpetual efficacy. It is one, the world's sins are many, but the single sacrifice is more than all of them. It is a past act, but its consequences are eternal, and flow down through all the ages. The text explains wherein consists the perpetual efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, and the reason why it needs no repetition while the world lasts. It endures for ever, because it has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Now, in looking at these words, two things are noteworthy. One is the double designation here of the persons whom Christ influences by His offering, in that they are 'perfected,' and in that they are 'sanctified.' Another is the double aspect of our Lord's work here set forth in regard to time, in that it is, in the first part of the sentence, spoken of as a past act whose consequences endure — 'He hath perfected' — and in the latter part of our text, according to the accurate rendering, it is spoken of as continuous and progressive, as yet incomplete and going on to perfection- For the text ought to read — 'He hath perfected for ever them that are being sanctified.' So there you have these two things, the double view of what Christ does, 'perfects' and 'sanctifies,' and the double view of His 'work, in that in one aspect it is past and complete, and in another aspect it is running on, continuous, and as yet unfinished.

I. First, then, look at the twofold aspect of the effect of Christ's sacrifice.

By it we are 'perfected,' 'sanctified.' Now, these two words, so to speak, cover the same facts, but they look at them from two different points of view. One of them looks at the completed Christian character from the human point of view, and the other looks at it from the divine. For, what does 'perfect' mean in the New Testament? It means, as many a passage might be quoted to show, 'mature,' 'full grown,' in opposition to 'babes in Christ.' This very Epistle uses the two phrases in that antithesis, but the literal meaning of the word is that which has reached its end, that which has attained what it was meant to be; and, according to the New Testament teaching, a man is perfected when he has all his capabilities and possibilities of progress and goodness and communion with God made into realities and facts in His life, when the bud has flowered, and the flower has fruited, When capacity is developed, privileges enjoyed, duties attended to, relationships entered into and maintained — when these things have taken place the man is perfect. It is to be observed that there is no reference in the word to any standard outside of human nature. If a man has become all that it is possible for him to be, he is, in the fullest sense, perfect. But Scripture also recognises a relative perfection, as we have already remarked, which consists in a certain maturity of Christian character, and has for its opposite the condition of 'babes in Christ.' So Paul exhorts 'as many as be perfect' to be 'thus minded' — namely, not to count themselves to have apprehended, but to stretch forward to the things which rare before, and to press towards the goal which still gleams far in advance. Consider, now, that other description of a Christian character as

'sanctified.'

The same set of facts in a man's nature is thought of in that word, only they are looked at from another point of view. I suppose I do not need to enlarge upon the fact which, however, I am afraid a great many good people do not realise as they should, that the

Biblical notion of 'saint' and 'sanctified' does not begin with character, but with relation, or, if I might put it more plainly, it does not, primarily and to start with, mean righteous, but 'belonging to God.' The Old and the New Testament concur in this conception of 'sanctity,' or 'holiness,' which are the same thing, only one is a Latin word and the other a Teutonic one — namely, that it starts from being consecrated and given up to God, and that out of that consecration will come all manner of righteousness and virtues, beauties of character, and dispositions and deeds which all men own to be 'lovely... and of good report.' The saint is, first of all, a man who knows that he belongs to God, and is glad to belong to Him, and then, afterwards, he becomes righteous and pure and radiant, but it all starts with yielding myself to God.

So the same set of characteristics which in the word 'perfected' were considered as fulfilling the idea of manhood, as God has given it to us, are massed in this other word, and considered as being the result of our yielding ourselves to Him. That is to say, no man has reached the end which he was created and adapted to reach, unless he has surrendered himself to God. You never be 'perfected' until you are 'sanctified.'

You must begin with consecration, and then holiness of character, and beauty of conduct, and purity of heart will all come after that. It is vain to put the cart before the horse, and to try to work at mending your characters, before you have set right your relationship to God. Begin with sanctifying, and you will come to perfecting. That is the New Testament teaching. And there is no way of getting to that perfection except, as we shall see, through the one offering.

II. In the next place notice here the completed work.

'By one offering He hath "perfected" us, the Christian people of this generation, the Christian people yet to be born into the world, the men that have not yet learned that they belong to Him, but who will learn it some day. Were they all 'perfected' eighteen centuries ago? In what sense can that perfecting be said to be a past act? Suppose you take some purifying agent, and throw it in at the headwaters of a river, and it goes down the stream, down and down and down, and by degrees purifies it all. If you like to use long-winded words, you can say that 'potentially' the river was purified when the precipitating agent was flung into it, though its waves were still foul with impurity. Or you can put it into plainer English and say that the past act has its abiding consequences, for there has been thrown into the centre of human history, as it were, that which is amply adequate to the 'perfecting' and the 'sanctifying' of every soul of the race. And that is what the writer of this Epistle means when he says 'He hath perfected,' because that sacrifice, like the precipitating agent that I have spoken about, has been flung into the stream of the world's history, and has power to make pure as the dew-drop, or as the water that flows from melting ice, every foul-smelling, darkly dyed drop of the filthy stream.

'By one offering; Now the word that the writer employs there is a very unusual one in Scripture. He has just been using it in a previous verse, where he speaks about 'the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.' Did you ever notice that remarkable expression 'the offering of the body,' not as we usually read, the 'blood.' What does that mean? I think it means this, that the writer is contemplating not only the culminating sacrifice of Calvary, but Christ's offering of Himself all through His earthly life; and knitting together in one the life and the death, the totality of His work, as that by which He has 'perfected for ever all them that are being sanctified.' And that, I think, is made quite certain, because he has just been speaking, and the words of my text refer back to the declaration in one of the psalms 'Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God,' as expressing the whole meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That saying of the psalmist was fulfilled not only on the Cross but in all His daily life.

Jesus Christ, then, in His whole manifestation, in His life, but not only in His life; and in His death, but not only in His death, has offered Himself unto God, 'the Lamb without blemish, and without spot.' And in that offering culminating in the death upon the Cross, but not confined thereto, there does lie the power which is triumphantly more than adequate to deal with all the foulnesses and sins of the world, and to perfect for ever any man that attaches himself to it. It deals with our guilt as nothing else can. It speaks to our consciences as nothing else can. It takes away all the agony and the pain, or all the dogged deadness, of a seared conscience. It deals with character. In that great offering, considered as including Christ's life as well as His death, and considered as including Christ's death as well as His life, you have folded up in indissoluble unity the pattern, the motive, and the power for all righteousness of character; and he reaches the end for which God created him, who, laying his hand on the head of that offering, not only transfers his sins to it, but receives its righteousness into him. By one offering that dealt with guilt, and wiped it all out, and that deals with the tyranny of evil, and emancipates us from it, and that communicates to us a new life formed in righteousness after the image of Him that created us, we are delivered from the burden of our sins and perfected, in so far as we lay hold of the power that is meant to cleanse us.

There is no other way of being perfected. You will never reach the point which it is possible for you to attain, and you will never fulfil the purpose for which God made you, unless you have joined yourself by faith to Jesus Christ, and are receiving into your life, and developing in your character, the power which He has lodged in the heart of humanity for redemption and purifying.

III. Now one last word. We have here the continuous and progressive work of Christ, and the growing experience, of Christians.

As I have remarked, the last clause of my text would be more completely rendered if we read, 'them that are being sanctified.' The same idea is set forth by the apostle Paul in that solemn passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, where he speaks about the double effect of the gospel upon 'them that are perishing; and on them that are being saved.' In both cases there is a process going on. The same idea is brought out, too, in the other expression in the Acts of the Apostles, about the 'Lord adding to the Church daily,' not, as the Authorised Version has it, 'such as should be saved,' but 'them that were being saved.' We may speak of salvation as past, as all included in the initial act by which we are knit to Jesus Christ through faith, when as guilty sinners we come to Him and cast ourselves on Him. We may speak of salvation as being future, and lying beyond this vale of tears and battlefield of sins and sorrow. But we can speak of it more accurately than in either of these aspects, as a point in the past, prolonged into a line in the present, and running on into the future. For salvation is a process which is going on day by day, if we are right, and which I am afraid is not progressive in a very great many professing Christian people. Perfected, I said, meant full-grown. I wonder about how many of us it would need to be said, 'Ye are babes in Christ, and when for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you which be the first principles of the oracles of God.' Salvation is a progressive process. That is to say, if we are truly joined to Jesus Christ, we are growingly influenced by the powers of His Cross and the gift of His Spirit.

There is no limit to that growth. It is like a spiral which goes up and up and up, and in every convolution 'draws nearer to the centre, but never reaches it. Our hearts and spirits are wonderfully elastic. They can take in a great deal more of God than we think they can, or than they ever have taken in. We can receive just as much of that infinite Life into our finite spirits as we will. Let us each strive to get more and more of Jesus Christ in us, that we may know Him, and the 'power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings,' more fully, more deeply, and may keep it more constantly. Oh, brethren! if we are not ascending the ladder that reaches to heaven, which is Christ Himself, we are descending; and if we are not growing we are dwindling; and if we cannot say that we are being sanctified, we are being made more and more common and profane.

I am not going to say one word about whether absolute perfection or absolute sanctification can be reached in this life. If you and I were many hundreds of miles farther on the road, it would be worth discussing whether we could reach the goal or not. Never mind about the possibilities of abstract and perfect sanctification, we are a good long way off that.

Look after the next step in advance, and leave the ultimate one to take care of itself. Only remember, that whilst Christ's past work has in it perpetual and absolute power to make any man perfect, no man will be sanctified unless he is sanctified by 'faith that is in Me,' and by the effort to work into his life and character the gift of the Divine Spirit and of the life of Christ which he receives by faith. It is 'them that are being sanctified' to whom the large hopes of this great text apply, and who may be sure that one day they will be absolutely perfected.